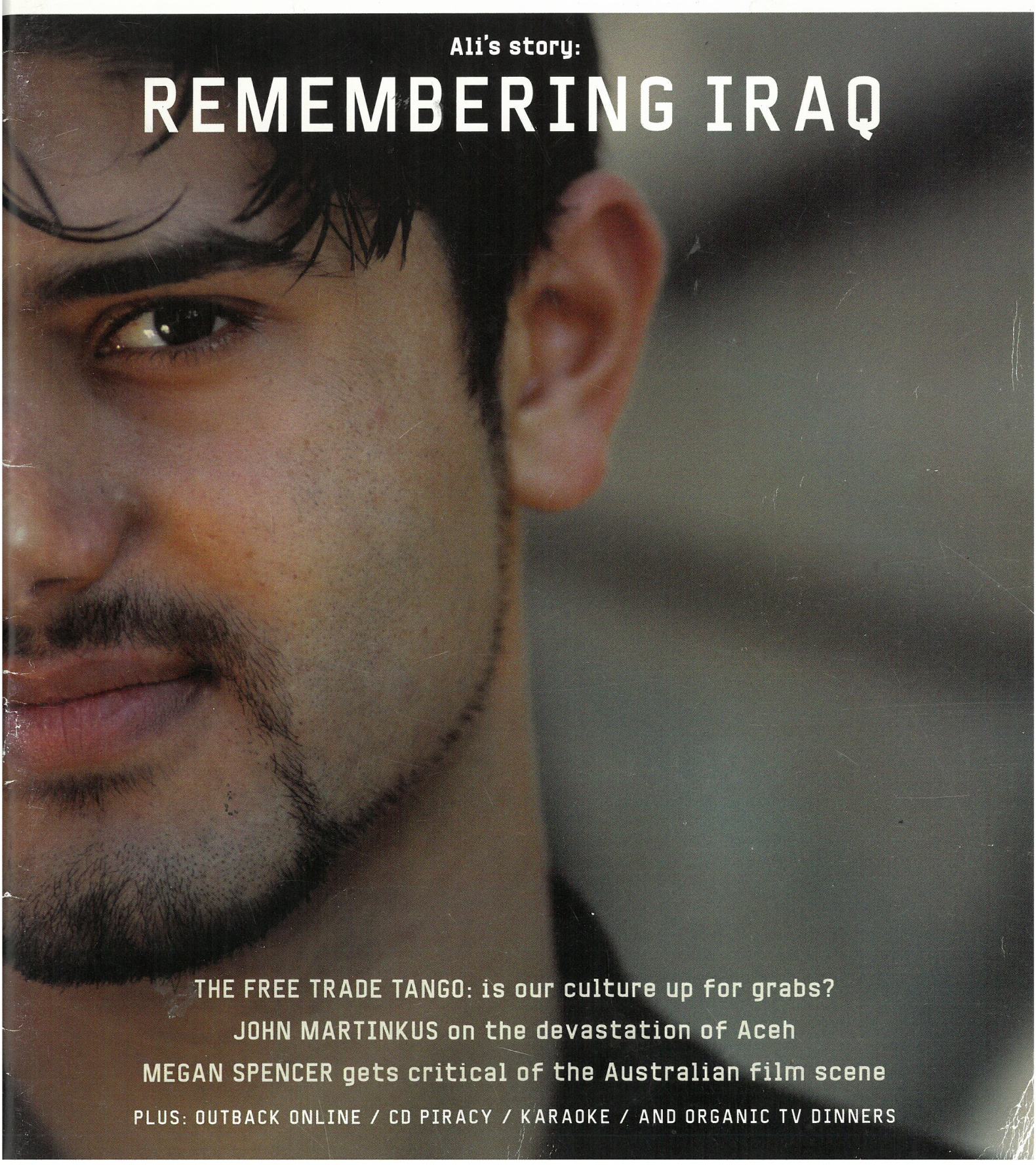
ISSUE ONE
WINTER/SPRING
2003

9 771447 975015

$6.00 AUS
PRICE INCLUDES GST
ISSN 1447-9753

SPINACH7

CULTURE / ISSUES / ART / TECHNOLOGY / ASIA PACIFIC // SPINACH7.COM



Ali's story:

REMEMBERING IRAQ

THE FREE TRADE TANGO: is our culture up for grabs?

JOHN MARTINKUS on the devastation of Aceh

MEGAN SPENCER gets critical of the Australian film scene

PLUS: OUTBACK ONLINE / CD PIRACY / KARAOKE / AND ORGANIC TV DINNERS

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AUSTRALIAN MADE • AUSTRALIAN OWNED
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Love handles.

EDITORIAL

MARNI CORDELL & EVE VINCENT

Spinach7 goes out to people who want to know more about the world we live in. Our media feeds us a steady diet of bad news, often leaving us feeling complacent and disempowered. *Spinach7* is an intervention into that process. Instead of bringing you bad news, *Spinach7* focuses on creative and positive initiatives; because although we recognise that the world has many complex problems, as audiences we've become all too accustomed to tragedy.

Spinach7 is a collection of small, untold stories that explore Australia's relationship with the Asia-Pacific region. In providing a focus on the region that we live in, we hope to challenge assumed alliances between Australia, the US and Europe.

Spinach7 gives space to voices that aren't being heard, and will serve as a memory of projects, ideas and aspirations that are currently being left out of public discussion.

In this, our first edition, the feature article 'Free Trade Tango' by Aren Z. Aizura anticipates a scenario in which local culture becomes 'fair game for trade'. Subsidised film and television production, and the ability of funding bodies to support innovative arts practice may soon be something to feel nostalgic about. Then again, many of our commentators point to a squeeze on cultural production in the present — Megan Spencer rails against the reluctance of film commissioners to foster an exciting documentary-making industry, and Catford Coles, reviewing a book written at a time when 'Russian authors were expected to write boring shite about peasants yanking beetroot from the glorious Earth whilst singing the praises of Stalin' argues that writers have a responsibility to push on through censorship. And that applies to Australian writers, now. We may not be sent to the Hotel Gulag for doing so, but *Spinach7* brings you writers willing to take real risks. Ben Bohane treks through West Papuan peaks to interview the guerrilla commanders of the Free West Papua movement, and John Martinkus reports on Aceh, describing a village he visited last December that no longer exists.

Importantly, the risks our writers take are not only of the heroic, boys-own adventure kind. Like Aizura, who counts on the 'resilience of culture', *Spinach7* is proud to showcase a dynamic collection of creators; of people who tailor-make designer knickers, take their art to the street and engage in interesting and intelligent conversations with the world around them. We hope this magazine inspires many more such conversations.

Enjoy edition one.

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THE SPINACH7 TEAM WOULD LIKE TO THANK
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SPINACH7 MAGAZINE IS PUBLISHED BY
Spinach7.com
PO Box 12222
A'Beckett Street Post Office
Melbourne Victoria 8006, Australia
info@spinach7.com
ABN: 49 073 523 243
ISSN: 1447 9753

ADVERTISING ENQUIRIES
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Freelance submissions accepted but no responsibility taken for unsolicited material.

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Spinach7 is published four times a year.

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YEAH, RIGHT...

ESCAPE FROM WOOMERA: THE GAME

www.escapefromwoomera.org

The team behind the video game *Escape From Woomera* knew they'd stir up controversy, just not so soon. Having obtained funding from the Australia Council in May this year, the group are only just beginning to collate research and set about writing and creating the prototype, which they aim to launch in November. What they didn't expect was for Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock to pick up the story and run with it.

Displaying his usual flare for spin, Ruddock expressed his outrage on talkback radio at the notion that the council would fund a group that planned on exploiting the refugee's plight and encouraging people to break the law. 'The coverage we got is a perfect example of how adept the government... is at distracting the Australian public from the real issue', says Kate Wild, writer and researcher on the project.

As usual, reality is quite different to the sound bite. *Escape From Woomera* is a non-profit project put together by a group of graphic artists, documentary journalists, writers, games developers and animators who have been angered for years by Australia's treatment of refugees. Not content to merely board the bus to Baxter, they see this video game as a chance to use their skills to explore beyond the 30-second news grab.

Through extensive research and consultation with refugee rights groups, former detainees, lawyers and journalists, the *Escape From Woomera* team aim to do something that the government has tried very hard to prevent — grant the Australian public access to the inside of a detention centre, albeit a virtual one.

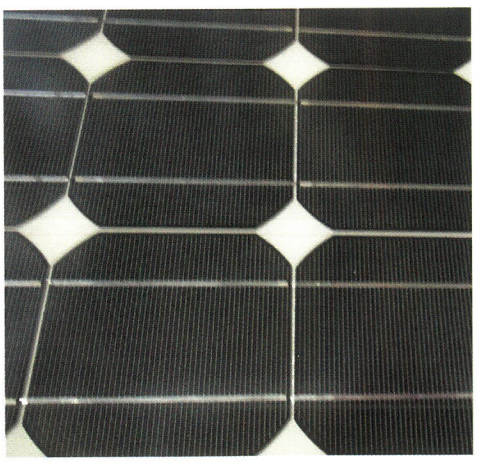
'Part of the media policy of the Department of Immigration is to limit vision of detainees', says Kate. 'Don't let anyone see their faces. Don't let anyone hear them speak. Dehumanise them. Don't let them be individuals because that's when people start caring about them. This game is about immersing people in the experience.'

The game, which will be available to download for free from the internet, will be presented in an adventure-game format. The player becomes a detainee who must navigate their way out of the detention centre, whether it's cutting through the red tape or hurdling over the wire. The team aim to be as true to life as possible.

Kate, a documentary journalist, is the only team member without a background in video games. Her familiarity with the format extended as far as *Frogger*, but after playing contemporary games, she was astounded by the medium's potential: 'If it was just a computer game I wouldn't be interested. But it has such potential as a way of communicating. As a journalist working in television and radio I've sometimes thought "I'm just clogging up people's minds with more information — how do I get them to listen?" And I think this is a really exciting way of achieving that.'

In the meantime, the controversy surrounding the game should translate into thousands of hits on the website and more public funding. 'Philip Ruddock gave us 25 million dollars' worth of publicity for a $25 thousand grant', says Kate. Perhaps the team could express their gratitude best by giving him a starring role in the final product.

SOPHIE BLACK.



SOLAR MARKET

The largest city-based solar power installation in the Southern Hemisphere has been launched at Melbourne's Queen Victoria Market. A system of 1300 photo-voltaic panels cover one third of the market's roof area and are expected to generate up to 250 MWH of electricity — enough to power 60 homes.

To be run by the Melbourne City Council, which contributed $1 million to the project, it is predicted the system will reduce greenhouse emissions by around 11 000 tonnes over the next 30 years. It could also be extended to cover the entire 10 000 square metres of roof at the market — a move that would make it the biggest system of its kind in the world.

Melbourne City Council expects the installation to save it $37 thousand in electricity bills each year. Excess electricity will be bought back by Origin Energy, the company that was awarded the installation contract along with BP Solar in September 2002.

And in more good news for the environment, the Queen Victoria Market itself is undergoing energy efficiency reforms, which are expected to reduce the market's energy consumption by 40 per cent.

JOHN KELLY

Louis Porter

SHORT LEGS AND LACE

Melbourne designer Jessie Willow Tucker makes knickers that are 'sexy, sensible and fun on lots of different bums'. Jessie tailored her first pair of knickers two years ago and now sells them in the independent design stores *Lupa* and *Queen* in Melbourne — but also creates 'special requests' for individuals according to taste. Her one-off creations combine materials sourced from 'the back of crazy little cloth shops' and 'reclaimed retro bits and pieces from second-hand stores'. These old fabrics are the inspiration for her designs, providing an endless supply of unique colours and patterns to work with. And if they look like something your grandma might get around in, Jessie assures *Spinach7* it's a popular look: 'I made the first pair in this style because that's how I like 'em! And I've since discovered that others like their knickers like this too.' EVE VINCENT

Willow designs <willowsealface@yahoo.com>

DEADLY TREADLIES

Michael Klerk

In a shed out the back of a community-based youth service in Alice Springs, people are busting apart old bikes and breathing new life into back-pedal-braking BMXs, old roadies and revamped mountain bikes. Bike builders are divided from the rest of the centre by a fence constructed from old bike wheels welded to reused steel posts.

Despite the chaos of the work area, this is a coordinated effort. As part of the Deadly Treadlies project, young people are building bikes donated by the Bowerbird Tip Shop and the Northern Territory Police stolen-bikes supply. The deal is: you spend a few hours working on bikes to be sold to the public, and then you start working on a bike for yourself. Deadly Treadlies participants ride away with a new pedal-machine, lock, helmet and — importantly in a town where bike theft is common and proving ownership is an issue — an owner's card.

The young people that are part of Deadly Treadlies are from a mix of cultural backgrounds, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, and often from groups that are marginalised by the broader community. Many have experienced extreme family breakdown, varying forms of abuse, and have often had repeated contact with the police and the criminal justice system. Some have spent time in detention and most have negative experiences of formal learning environments. Violence is a constant in many of these young people's lives.

The Deadly Treadlies project was started in response to the interests of young people who identified a bike-building project as a good way to alleviate the boredom and problems faced in their day-to-day lives. There have been numerous bike projects in Alice over the years. Many have been successful — with some expanding to provide hire bikes for tourists. Unfortunately, all have had limited life spans. Deadly Treadlies aims to take the concept a step further by employing some participants as trainee bike-mechanics, providing training and skills workshops, and ultimately making the project self-funding through bike sales and other business initiatives.

Bike building provides an opportunity to hone mechanical skills, put energy into something positive, and get a cheap form of transport — an important point for the majority of participants who live on town camps on the outskirts of Alice Springs. There is limited access to recreation for a lot of young people in this area. Deadly Treadlies is one answer, and can provide a stepping stone to other projects, other forms of learning and even employment.

At the very least, in the words of one participant, 'it's better than me having to steal a bike'.
IAN SWEENEY

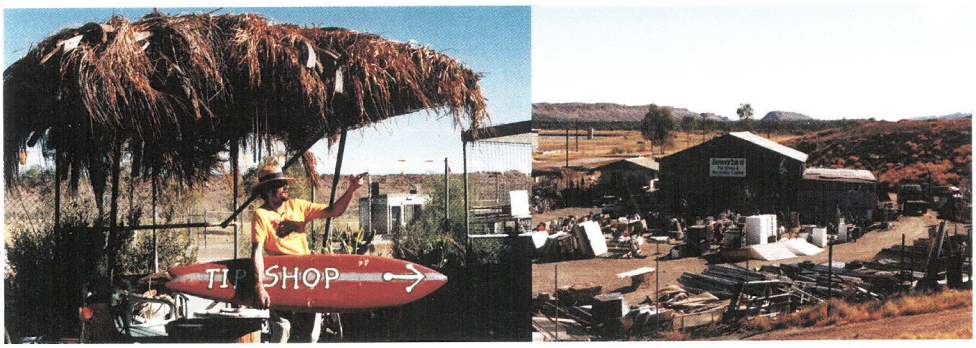
DRINK UP

Drunkenness: a disturbing, depressing symptom of the alienation of life under capitalism. But so much fun! It's one of capitalism's many contradictions, so it demands a political solution, and nothing puts the social in socialism like a good drinking ritual. So if you really want to liven up your vanguard party, try one of these...

Drambuie Nipples. You'll need drambuie, wine glasses and a cigarette lighter. Pour a shot of drambuie into the wine glass, light it, and stick it to your chest. The flame will go out, creating a vacuum that sucks your tit into the glass. When the suction stops remove and scull! The theory is that the alcohol fumes will get you drunker faster, but in practice the appeal is the hilarious sight of drunk boys with wine-glass-shaped man-boobs (not as funny on girls, but still totally worth it). And then you'll want a second one to get that great tingling feeling in both your tits.

Russian Cocaine. You'll need vodka, lemon, sugar and instant coffee. Slice up the lemon, and dip one side in the coffee, the other in the sugar. Do the shot and suck the lemon (important note: sugar side to your tongue). Oh my God! The first time I tried these I got drunker than I have ever been in my life and, as anyone who knows me can attest, that is *very* drunk. SHANE McGRATH.

BOWERBIRDS



Ian Sweeney

Driving south of Alice Springs, just out town, there's a turn off that follows the Western MacDonnell Ranges. Running alongside this road is a lengthy landform, a man-made mimic of the mountain range that lies behind it. Underneath the eroding topsoil and saltbush lie millions of tonnes of refuse from Alice. Old fellas will tell you that the road that now climbs to the top of this ever-growing hill, used to run into a shallow valley.

This monument to refuse grows by hundreds of tonnes each day, seven days a week. It's an impressive effort for a community of fewer than 30 000 people.

Recycling at the Alice Springs tip is minimal. About a year ago an operation was set up by Indigenous Landscapes —an arm of the Tangentyere Council —to start separating organic material, to be composted into mulch. Non-ferrous metals such as aluminium and copper are worth their weight and trucked to Adelaide. But the majority of glass and all plastic, paper and steel waste, end up underground.

Surely not everything in this man-made extension of the MacDonnell Range deserves to be buried? As many people know there are a lot of amazing things that end up at the tip. The Arid Lands Environment Centre (ALEC) decided there was enough to run a salvage operation and the Bowerbird Tip Shop was established.

Bowerbird has been operating for two and half years as an arm of ALEC, with profits going back to the centre. It operates the weighbridge at the tip's entrance and holds sole salvage rights to the tip face.

The Tip Shop is many things to many people. It's an ethical pay cheque. It's environmental activism in its most direct form. Or it is simply a cheap mattress for those who can't afford one elsewhere.

The work is physically demanding and in summer — with temperatures well over 40 degrees— it is testing. The reward, however, is looking over the Bowerbird yard at the end of the day. From fridges to computers and books to motorbikes. From clothes to paints or the occasional bath, the variety is endless.

We never cease to be amazed at what the tip provides — but we are still waiting for the fridge full of cold beer that once turned up on a tip face in Hobart. IAN SWEENEY

FOOD FACTS

Organic industrial complex

The organic food industry is currently recognised as the world's fastest growing food sector with worldwide sales estimated to be worth US$20 billion, and growing between 5 and 20 per cent per annum. That's why Gerber's, Heinz, Horizon, Dole, and ConAgra — the very agribusiness companies (massified agricultural regimes) that the organic industry rose as an alternative to — have all created or acquired organic brands.

Milk baths

Water is tipped to become the next major resource that people will start fighting over. Yet people in the est stilluse it as flippantly as Cleopatra is said to have used milk for her baths. In Australia, the driest continent on earth, we irrigate our colonial imitation lawns with our technologically purified drinking water; we even shit in our drinking water, while worldwide more than 1.7 billion people do not have access to clean water, let alone the luxury of having it splash their arse twice a day!

Organic TV dinner

Organic TV dinners are now on the market — sold in a package that will take hundreds of years to decompose. Perhaps they should be washed down with a 500ml bottle of purified water — the containers can keep each other company.

The future is retro

As we slowly realise the benefits of non-industrial organic farming, it is strange to remember that much domestic food production in many economically poorer countries is organic by economic exclusion — due to the expense of chemicals, herbicides, and pesticides. The irony is most pronounced in the case of Cuba, which, because of the decades-old US embargo and limited financial resources, never really got away from organic farming. Now it's poised to become a major supplier to the world market. JOHN PACE

RE-WIRING EXTINCTION

JEAN POOLE gets greasy under the bonnet of the greatest delete key of them all.

As a member of the species most effective at extinguishing others, I've gotta admit I'm a sucker for extinction's soft brown eyes. Could be that I'm just mesmerised by their gently-domed reflection of the vast human project and all it's flaws, but there's something about eye-ing off the grandest of fades to black; it gets to you at a deeper-than-gut level. And there's no escape in the infogeddon: today's air is dense with reminders. As Frank Black, the sad punk, used to croon/creak/rasp/threaten: 'I smeehhll smoooke that comes from a gun named extinnnngctsionnn'. The Pixies have long since vanished, but the firestarters behind that smoke are easily pinpointed — humans have clocked the high score on cosmic wipe-out many times over. That sorta behaviour's been dirtyin' extinction's good name long enough, time for us to be stealin' it back.

Digging archeology

Remixing the future requires accurate sampling of the past. Hard to go past those who dig for bones. They'll tell you there've been five major bouts of extinction, with the last one scuttling the dinosaurs. Scientists believe we are on the cusp or in the midst of number five. The WWF (not the wrestlers) states it baldly:

'At present rates of extinction, as many as 20 per cent of the world's 7-15 million species could be gone in the next 30 years.'

Present rates? Spend 20 minutes googling the stats for the dwindling African black rhinos, the cheetahs or elephants. In that time, we'll have lost another species for all time. That's three an hour, or around 74 a day according to the guestimators of such things. Meaning half of the world's flora and fauna could be on the way out within 100 years. Which brings us to our first strategy for reclaiming extinction.

Kill the cute and pretty animals

Also referred to as 'emblem species' by some scientists, referring to the way that eco-lobbyists use cuties to appeal to the general public's heart-strings while aiming to conserve larger ecologies. If we could just get rid of all the koalas and dolphins, the vast multitudes of uglier animals — with their own significant roles to play within the eco-system — might have their threatened extinction shown a little more respect.

The last Tasmanian tiger

Under a wintry rising moon in the Hobart Zoo, and drawing on a genetic heritage of some 3 000 years, the last known Tasmanian tiger howled with its last breaths the saddest music you've ever heard, before wasting away. Decades later, the Hobart Museum discovered a Tassie tiger foetus preserved with its DNA intact. I had to see it, and after much negotiation, I was taken upstairs to a private office where a large glass jar containing a rubber replica of the tiger foetus was taken off the shelf for me to peruse. If you can see in your mind's eye the baby in *The Elephant Man*, then you've probably got an accurate idea of the replica on hand. They're hoping to recreate one by 2010 with DNA samples from it (tiger not elephant, real not rubber). While such *Jurassic Park* schemes are endlessly fascinating, with some 25 000 species disappearing forever each year, it seems more feasible at this stage to reinvent extinction as warning bell, rather than scramble around looking for an undo button.

Data conservation

In the media ecology, CDs and DVDs will presumably one day be relegated to the dustbins of history, given tech+media acceleration. Maybe they'll find some retro respect and delayed redundance — who knows? A more interesting query: how long will the current systems set up to distribute these discs last, before caving in on themselves? Is Mp3 really the new radio? DivX the new cinema? Does this mean our grandkids'll ask: 'What's a record company?' 'What's a video rental store?' There's too much money in them there hills for the data networks to turn their backs on; so although the methods of distribution and pie-slicing are in the midst of giant transitions — and change is inevitable — there'll undoubtedly remain pie-slicers of some sort for the foreseeable future.

Music containing distorted guitars

Is unlikely to disappear anytime before the collapse of the above, but there are other more interesting considerations for the guitar. Re-animating the exquisitely quirky corpse of everybody's secretly favourite band might be possible if we can somehow extract juice from recordings The Pixies have left behind. Let some future maths-head anally analyse these discs and concoct a series of algorhythms for producing endless genetic variations of music The Pixies might've made — with a lame filter to dramatically reduce its quality after ten albums. For now, we can only face the music: The Pixies are gone. Kaput. Vamoosh. Extinguished.

Reunion tour rumours

As members of the species most effectively extinguishing others, it's a mighty ripe time for behaviour modification. A Pixies reunion is possible, although unlikely. On the other hand — scientists and technologists can save us. All they have to do to turn back the tide of extinction is invent a machine that stops crucial habitat destruction, limits human population growth, evens out our distribution of goods, foods and wealth, and curbs human greed. The internet would be a walkie-talkie on such a machine. ●

JEAN POOLE is a Melbourne-based scribbler 'n pixel masher.
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SINGA'S PICKS

JIM SINGLINE on new art around the country.

The Australian Art Eclector

A dynamic network of artists from around the country will soon be launching their new DIY magazine **The Australian Art Eclector**. The feature of each issue will be an installment of Australia's 50 Most Un-Collectable Artists.

Phil T Luca, magazine editor and spokesperson for the Network of Un-Collectable Artists (NUCA) explains: 'The compendium of Australia's 50 Most Un-Collectable Artists will be an important resource, especially for those wishing to look beyond the pseudo-official canon of Australian artists who have been vetted and rubberstamped by our short-sighted and commodity-oriented art institutions.'

The group obsessively documents the occurrence of ephemeral artworks, such as Weed-Killer/Pest Controller, an informative audio tour of the various weeds on a run-down drive-in theatre site in western Sydney, by artists Diego Bonetto and Emma Jay.

Other projects to make it into the top 50 were SquatSpace's SquatFest, an anti-TropFest screening of film and video by independent artists and activists (pictured); and the artists of Hotel 6151 in Perth, who occupied a condemned 1970s hotel with temporary installations and performances on every floor. The hotel was demolished shortly after.

Most works to make the cut were unwieldy installations, more subtle projects based around exchange and communication, and illegal activities such as billboard alterations.

For more info contact NUCA:
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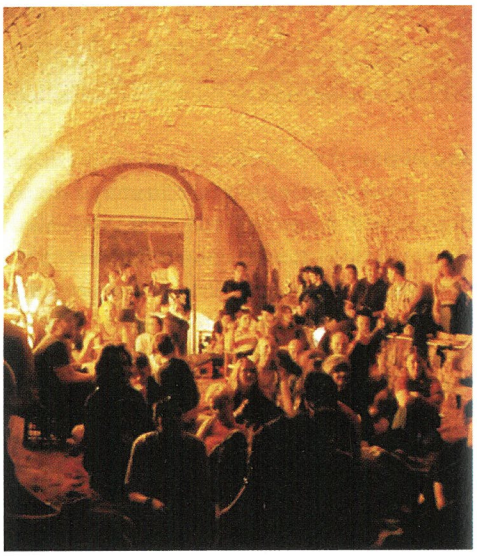
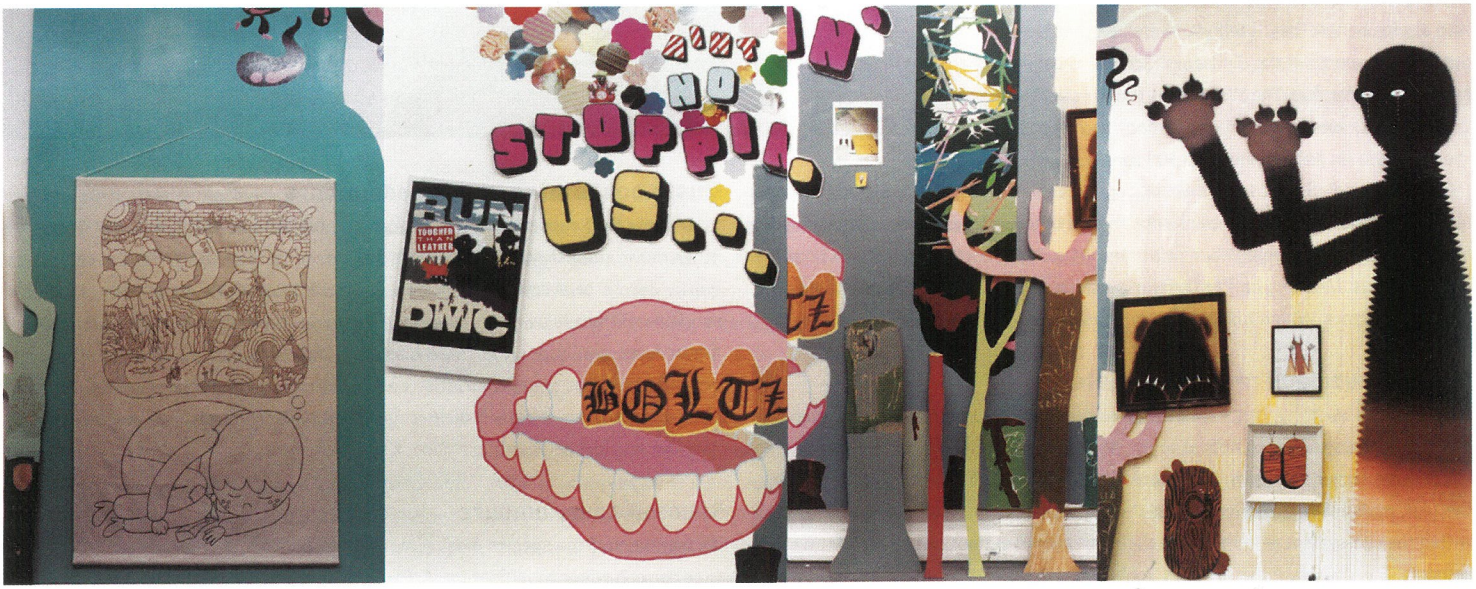
Text by Lucas Ihlein





Art no-fuss style

The Boltz's packed-out and boozed-up debut show of mid-2002 finely introduced the group as an art-gang out for a ruckus. Comprising Billie Stone, Josh Petherick, Sean Bailey and Niels (Nails), The Boltz presented a paint-on-everything jam of motley colour, renegade cartooning and revised pop iconography.

Shortly after, with a distinct absence of self-promotion, gang rules or manifesto, The Boltz found themselves with a rep and growing fame, to which Nails responds: 'we're not interested, as long as our friends dig our shit it doesn't really matter.'

In good humour, late May 2003 saw The Boltz call 'rival' art-gang The Voltz (otherwise known as Victorian College of the Arts locals, The Vaults) into battle. A red line was thrown down the middle of Fitzroy's Seventh Gallery in Melbourne and an art clash went down. 'The Voltz make incredibly beautiful handcrafted work as opposed to our visual vomit stuff! Which is a really good contrast I reckon,' says Nails. 'But if I had to make the call, I'd say: damn, The Voltz put up a good fight.' And with that, The Boltz are on their way, no-fuss style.

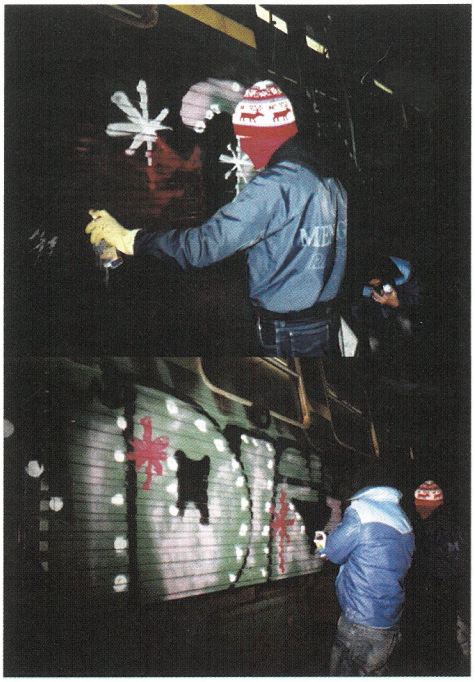
Look out for The Boltz as part of the Next Wave Festival's Fort project in early 2004.

Boltcutter 163 Meow and Renks are the two friends — and active graffiti writers — behind a new zine-ing collaboration, **Boltcutter 163**. From word go, Meow makes clear it's not all about graf: 'It's about stuff that interests us, what we get up to and what we love.'

The result is a scrapbook mix of collages, drawings, sketchbook work and photos aplenty. Renks and Meow let the images of *Boltcutter 163* do the storytelling: 'It's to do with walking round the city and the places we end up. The neglected space, rooftops, buildings being refurb'ed, stormwater drains and train tunnels.'

'A lot of it has to do with how Melbourne is changing so much, there's definitely an element of nostalgia. The old Hitachi trains, they're going. A lot of the old industrial areas are being moved out of the city to make way for apartment blocks. A lot of shit is disappearing and we'd like to get off our arses and have something to remember it by.'

For further info email: boltcutter163@yahoo.com



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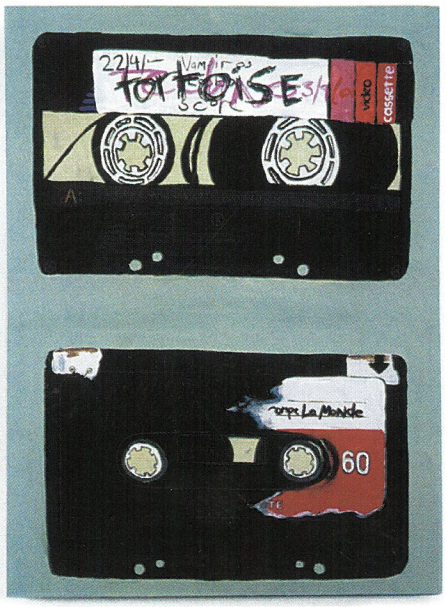


Liberated vinyl This stretched-vinyl billboard came under the knives of **Mickie Quick** and the **Ugly Schmuckling**. Firstly, almost the entire billboard was cut out and removed. This was no easy operation. The top, being so high up, was impossible to cut with a knife, so when the sides and bottom were cut, the whole twelve-metre length needed to be ripped like a curtain to one side. The liberated vinyl turned into some serious bulk, but the culprits managed to abscond with it.

Later, specially selected parts of the sign were returned and glued up to spell its new message. This second part of the operation was done in broad daylight using an A-frame ladder and workers' overalls. Although a couple of cars honked their acknowledgement of the deed, especially as the last words were put in place, a similar sighting at nighttime would have raised instant suspicion and alarm. The converted sign lasted a good nine days.

Mickie Quick is old Aussie slang for 'a quick getaway', as in: 'struth! we nearly nabbed him but he's gone and done a Mickie Quick on us!' The term is currently being revived as a pseudonym by one naughty culture-jammer. Check out Mickie Quick's upcoming retrospective of billboard alterations, media pranks and interventions: Before/After 1994-2003, postered as a wallzine around Space3 (151 Regent St, Sydney).

Mutha of a mash There's no doubt sampling, bootlegging and plunderphonic techniques have become musical mediums in their own right. In early June, **Ghetto Blast: Mutha of a Mash Museum** transformed Sydney's Kudos Gallery into an exploding homage to the practices we have fondly come to know as Mash. Dominique of Soda_Jerk, the collective behind the exhibition, shared her thoughts:

'What I find most seductive about sampling is that it opens consumption up to creativity. Whether you produce plunderphonics tracks or not, for me the impulse to sample is there when you channel surf or miss the plot of a film because you can't focus on anything but the femme fatale's shoes. It's a process of selection — the personalised way you cut up commodities to get kicks. Mash artists just take this impulse further by employing their consumption filters to produce another product.

'The exhibition was a way of delivering a public diss to the increasing control of culture by the Copyright Cops. In terms of the installation concept, we wanted to mess with the idea of museum-ology — the notion that there is a correct way to order cultural artefacts; art sits side by side with mash commodities like KFC's popcorn chicken.'

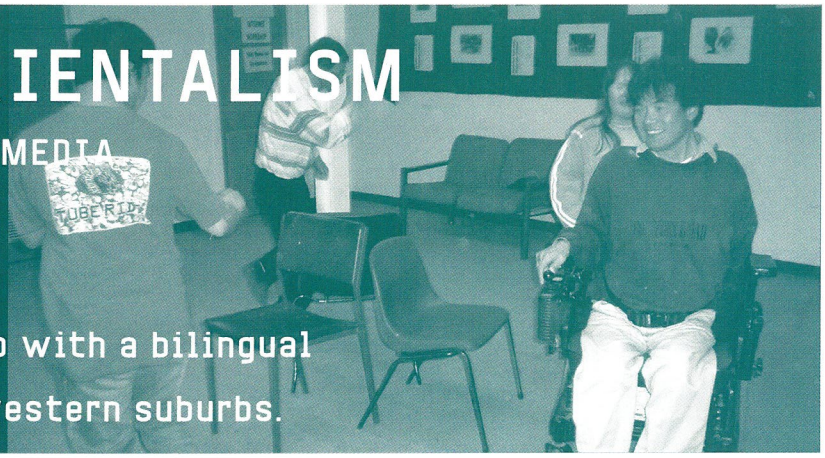
Shown above is Geoff Newton's ode to the dubbed mix tape, *Today's Cavities*.

JIM SINGLINE is a Sydney-based artist and media-maker.

QUICK ON THE STREETS Since moving to Melbourne, TOM CIVIL has been drawn to conversations taking place on the street. His distinctive vocabulary ranges from intricate fish stencils (middle right) to the gigantic proportions of the clumsy spaceperson (top right, no they're not miniature bricks). Civil takes his time constructing images at home and is quick on the streets. Wary of the sticky fingers of corporations and advertising agencies — which like to mimic, co-opt or steal from urban-art imagery — Civil says: 'If you're a street artist, keep it on the street'. *Spinach7* is glad he made a (principled) exception for this page. ●

DIASPORIC DISORIENTALISM

AUSTRALIAN VIETNAMESE YOUTH MEDIA



Scott Brook and Lian Low catch up with a bilingual theatre group from Melbourne's western suburbs.

Disabled_Dot Com rehearsal, Footscray Community Arts Centre, AVYM.

All things Vietnamese seem to be in vogue — from Epicure write-ups on Footscray *pho* kitchens to *The Quiet American*, that recent Hollywood 'history' flick with gender politics reminiscent of the cover of *Master Mind*.

Undercutting the chic are Australian Vietnamese Youth Media (AVYM); a Melbourne western-suburbs-based theatre company working with Vietnamese and Australian communities to develop experimental theatre at the fringes of both cultural spaces. AVYM productions focus the broader topics of identity, culture and belonging through more specific issues such as unemployment, sexuality and depression. The challenge is to continually negotiate, chameleon-style, the misperceptions, blind spots and double-exposures of cross-cultural exchange.

Dominic Hong Duc Golding and Ty Andre talk here about all things AVYM.

Dominic: 'We tend to fall into the trap of always looking overseas for Asian-ness, when in fact through AVYM we're stating that we're here. We can find Asia and Asian-ness and Vietnamese-ness in Australia. You don't have to go to Vietnam. You don't have to go to Hong Kong. Our culture is just as rich here as it is over there. And we use our own mythology to portray the diaspora.'

Dominic and Ty are currently co-writing a play on living with disabilities. Dominic, the project facilitator and AVYM company manager, is running theatre workshops with about 10 disabled people and their families. The current working-title *Disabled_Dot com* will probably change. Having a hearing impairment and mild cerebral palsy, Dominic's original vision was for a 'cyborg' show about the body and technology, but this has been deferred in favour of working with the more everyday stories that are emerging from the participants.

Ty, a published author and cameraman whose credits include *Alby Mangels' World Safari I* and *II*, is scripting an autobiographical account of his experiences living in a wheelchair with post-polio syndrome. He talks about everyday encounters with discrimination, all the more harrowing for their pettiness: 'When we went to a restaurant in Richmond, they didn't want me to use [their] phone. My tyre was flat — got soaked and wet in the rain. They showed me there was a public phone out there. They didn't want me to use the phone from the restaurant. But the public phone — I can't even get in, because the door's narrower than the wheelchair and it's got little steps. Eventually they lent me the phone and as soon as I got off it they cleaned the whole phone up like I've got a disease or something. In a Vietnamese restaurant, would you believe it?'

AVYM productions typically use a variety of performance modes — acting, music, dance, martial arts — as well as pre-recorded film and live music. The effect is more along the lines of *Paris By Night* than anything Brechtian. Heavy-handed didacticism is shunted in favour of a montage of life stories. The narratives draw on a dizzying combination of modern / traditional, Eastern / Western cultural references; from Vo Vi Nam (traditional Vietnamese karate) through to Manga-style demon incantations; from Viet-pop karaoke through to Vong Co (Vietnamese opera); from declamatory existential monologue through to television skit.

Dominic explains that the next show will be similarly non-sequential: 'It's like a pack of cards. So Ty holds the clubs while the other people hold the hearts and it's like it's shuffled ... the two different styles of cards ... and you spread them out and you have almost like a patchwork of stories. So there's not a linear structure ... it's like catching glimpses of aspects of people's lives.'

Founded in 1994 by Tony Le Nguyen and currently under the artistic direction of Huu Tran, AVYM have developed a profile for producing bilingual theatre that has drawn its audience from both communities. Dominic: 'It's very important that the shows are bilingual. Some audience members are older Vietnamese who don't understand English, and then there's people like me, who don't understand Vietnamese at all.'

As many reviewers have noted, stereotypes are deliberately 'turned up to 11'; Aussie equals football, meat-pies and casual ethics; Vietnamese equals karaoke, fish sauce and authoritarian patriarchs. Dominic suggests stereotypes work as communication: 'I can understand why people criticise our shows. It may seem like we rely on stereotypes to make a point but that's not the case. We use stereotypes as a visual pinpoint so the audience will immediately recognise what it is.' And then, more pointedly: 'We use stereotypes to throw back at the community what they dish out at us. If that's what you want to see, okay ... we'll give you what you want.' ●

AVYM welcomes inquiries and new members:
vym@fcarts.org.au / (03) 9689 5677.
http://home.vicnet.net.au/avym

Lian Low is currently studying amongst computer geeks at Swinburne University. She has developed a love/hate relationship with technology and multimedia. She now finds 90 per cent of her time is spent staring at monitors and is convinced that this has very bad side effects.

Scott Brook share-houses in 'Footers' and takes the 402 bus to school. He also works at Footscray Community Arts Centre where he's been conspiring with others on *West of the West*, a print / CD anthology of Westie stuff (Altona & New York: Common Ground, forthcoming).

ASIA PACIFIC BRIEFS
Aleutian Islands
Hawaiian Islands
Northern Line Islands
Southern Line Islands
French Polynesia
Tuamotu Archipelago
Society Is.
Marquesas Is.
Pitcairn
Tubuai Is.
Cook Islands
Gilbert Is.
KIRIBATI
Phoenix Is.
Tokelau Is.
American Samoa
SAMOA
TUVALU
FIJI
Niue
TONGA
MARSHALL ISLANDS
NAURU
SOLOMON ISLANDS
VANUATU
New Caledonia
North Island
AOTEROA /NEW ZEALAND
South Island
Tasmania
AUSTRALIA
Sakhalin
Kuril Is.
Hokkaido
Honshu
JAPAN
Shikoku
Kyushu
Ryukyu Is.
Northern Mariana Islands
Guam
FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA
PALAU
PHILIPPINES
Mindanao
Luzon
Taiwan
Hong Kong, China
Macao, China
REP. OF KOREA
DEM. PEOPLE'S REP. OF KOREA
Sulawesi
WEST PAPUA
PAPUA NEW GUINEA
TIMOR LORO SA'E
Java
Sumatera
INDONESIA
SINGAPORE
MALAYSIA
BRUNEI DARUSSALAM
VIET NAM
CAMBODIA
THAILAND
BURMA
ACEH
MONGOLIA
CHINA
KAZAKHSTAN
KYRGYZSTAN
TAJIKISTAN
UZBEKISTAN
AFGHANISTAN
PAKISTAN
Jammu
Kashmir
INDIA
NEPAL
SRI LANKA
MALDIVES

AUSTRALIA DUPES TIMOR IN SEA NEGOTIATIONS

Little more than a year after the declaration of East Timor's independence from Indonesia, the Australian government is exploiting the new nation's fragile economic state to gain substantial ownership of gas fields in the Timor Sea. The two gas fields known as 'Bayu Undan' and 'Greater Sunrise' lie closer to East Timor than Australia and would almost certainly belong to East Timor under the maritime boundary provisions of the United Nations Convention on Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Yet it looks likely that Australia will end up with complete control of Greater Sunrise, the larger of the two fields. East Timor will receive less than 20 per cent of royalties.

The result of an agreement in 2001, the situation shows a callous disregard, on the part of Australia, for a smaller country that it has taken much credit for liberating. As early as October 1999, barely a month after INTERFET's intervention in the country, East Timorese leaders Xanana Gusmao, Jose Ramos Horta and Mari Alkatiri were being pressured to sign an agreement with Phillips Petroleum.

The draft treaty, which would eventually give Australia such an unfair advantage, was signed in July 2001 — but East Timor was far from happy with the provisions. Their chief negotiator from the United Nations, Peter Galbraith, stated that 'the royalties and the tax revenue from the area... should come to East Timor. That, after all, is what East Timor is entitled to under international law.'

While accepting that East Timor would receive 90 per cent of the royalties from Bayu Undan, the Australian government resisted East Timor's claims to Greater Sunrise, and withdrew from UNCLOS. East Timor, in dire need of revenue, needed to develop the smaller field. Aware of the tiny country's situation, the Australian government made its agreement to the development of Bayu Undan conditional on East Timor 'unitising' Greater Sunrise with the agreement; Bayu Undan could be developed only if East Timor agreed to Australia's demands.

The Timor Sea Treaty was eventually signed in May 2002. Although it contained a note agreeing that their maritime boundaries would not be compromised, the treaty made it almost impossible for East Timor to gain control and ownership of what should rightfully be theirs. Ratification of the agreement was undertaken in Dili in March this year, under great pressure from Australia, resulting in frosty relations.

Australia already makes $300 million a year from other oil fields that would belong to East Timor under UNCLOS. Now Australia looks set to take both the credit for its belated assistance in the liberation of East Timor, as well as millions of dollars worth of revenue which the East Timorese people are entitled to, and which they so desperately need. The amount Australia takes may be many times what it has supplied in peacekeeping and aid.

ROB WESLEY-SMITH

FINDERS KEEPERS?

The remains of 60 people dug up by scientists and their collectors during the late 1800s were returned to the Narrindjeri, of the lower Murray River region, from London's Royal College of Surgeons in April 2003. This followed the transferral of around 400 Aboriginal people's bodies from the University of Melbourne's 'Berry Collection' to Museum Victoria in September 2002 for repatriation. The universities in question have put a positive spin on such examples of benevolence, seeking to place distance between institutions now and the attitudes of the past, by highlighting brief instances of cooperation with Aboriginal 'stakeholders'.

However, this PR strategy masks the strongly held beliefs of some scientists who lament the 'loss to science' and 'missed research opportunities' that the return of Aboriginal ancestral remains represents to them. Bob Weatherall, of the Foundation for Aboriginal and Islander Research Action (FAIRA), observes that this prevailing attitude has prompted some institutions to attempt to bargain with Aboriginal people for continued access to human remains if they are to be returned to communities.

Full control of ancestral remains, however, is what FAIRA and campaigners such as Gary Murray, of the North West Nations Clans Aboriginal Corporation, have been fighting for. Desecration of burial grounds, which are considered in many cultures to be the strongest symbol of land ownership, and removal of ancestral remains to the institutions of a foreign invading force, is an abuse which some non-Aboriginal people have taken a long time to come to grips with. Murray has to emphasise: 'this is pretty heavy stuff. It takes a lot out of you.'

And the scientific research performed on Aboriginal peoples has been of little benefit. The research by Richard Berry of the Anatomy Department of the University of Melbourne between 1906 and 1929 is an example of what Weatherall calls 'scientific racism': 'They were trying to find proof of the inferiority of Aboriginal people and the superiority of whites.' As for the focus of current research, such as looking at the living conditions of Aboriginal people before invasion, 'it's as useful as tits on a bull'.

Murray says 'the problem, spiritually, is our ancestors will not rest until they're back in their country. But where do these remains come from originally?' Lack of proper record keeping by some scientists in the past is a major hindrance to repatriation.

A further frustration is that while state governments adopted a set of 'key principles' on repatriation in 1993, to date there have been no genuine commitments to fund land for reburial or ensure adequate protection of sites. Once repatriation is agreed upon, the financial burden of a proper burial becomes another obstacle. Murray, whose community has fought for the return of the remains of hundreds of individuals, says the amount of funding allocated suggests that institutions 'expect us to dig a big hole or pit and throw them in it!' CLARE LAND

POBOYA SAY NO TO RIO TINTO

The road to Palu on the island of Sulawesi, Indonesia, starts at Lake Poso. Here, lake-water trickles down the mountain and there is never a shortage of fresh drinking water. Further along, the road hugs the coast then winds upwards again into mountains clothed with lush tropical vegetation. But as the road emerges onto the western side of the mountain and descends into the regional capital of Palu, the backdrop abruptly changes to a dusty stubble of shrubs and dry-land crops.

Palu sits in a rain shadow, making it one of the driest places in Indonesia. Its unique climate renders it more reminiscent of Australia's dry landscape than most of Indonesia's other lush picture-postcard destinations.

One of Palu's few reliable water sources are the springs found in the dusty hills flanking the city. These hills are home to the indigenous people of Poboya. Their homes, fruit trees and sacred sites are located in the Poboya Great Forest Park, an area with protected legal status designed to safeguard the city's important water source. It is in these hills, however, that the Australian mining company Rio Tinto has gone — drilling and striking gold within the Poboya protected area.

Rio Tinto's 1997 concession area covers 500 hectares of the park. The company is lobbying to overturn environmental protection laws and has entered into an agreement to sell the project on to fellow Australian company Newcrest Mining if the project gains government approval. This, despite forestry laws — dating from 1990 and reiterated in 1999 — that prohibit destructive mining activity in designated forests and water catchments.

Members of indigenous Poboya communities aren't happy about Rio Tinto's plans. In April they held a gathering to mark Earth Day, which was attended by villagers from Ngapa Vatutela, Poboya, and Parigi Mpu and supported by students and non-government community organisations. The camp-out location was furnished with a 20-metre banner encircled by bamboo torches. The huge banner bore the words 'No to Rio Tinto'.

The camp-out included a discussion of the agenda for opposition to Rio Tinto, as well as ceremonies symbolising the opposition of the Poboya community, which fears betrayal by city leaders. 'If the Governor allows [these] mining plans, we're ready for war', declared Zamruddin, a resident of the Poboya area. 'We'll put a boycott on the use of the spring in our village which for so long has been a water source for the city of Palu.'

The Poboya community has the support of national environmental justice organisations such as the Indonesian Forum for the Environment, and the Indonesian Mining Advocacy Network, who are fighting throughout Indonesia against foreign mining companies, including BHP-Billiton, Newcrest and Rio Tinto, that wish to mine protected areas. The community hope that the Indonesian government will not give in to ongoing pressure from international mining companies and foreign governments to allow mining in the protected areas, including the Poboya area in which they live. IGOR O'NEIL

http://www.jatam.org/english/case/protected/
http://www.mpi.org.au

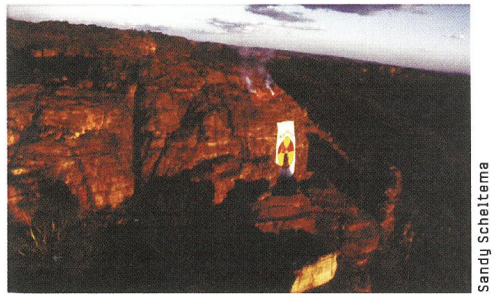
Friends of the Earth, UK

NO GUARANTEES ON JABILUKA

The bamboo-torch-encircled banner the Pobaya people carried on Earth Day in Sulawesi read 'No To Rio Tinto'. It was reminiscent, in scale and sentiment, of the banner dropped down a sheer red rock escarpment in Kakadu National Park on World Environment Day in 1997. This earlier banner, suspended like a flag above a vast network of freshwater floodplains, estuaries, mangroves and mud-flats, read 'Stop Jabiluka Mine'.

Since 1996 the campaign of the Mirrar people to stop the construction of a second uranium mine on their land has gained national and international recognition. Led by senior traditional owner Yvonne Margarula and the Mirrar-controlled Gundjehmi Aboriginal Corporation, the Mirrar have been resolute in the face of sustained pressure. In April 2003 Margarula reiterated the Mirrar's stance: 'The Mirrar People have fought against uranium mining in Kakadu for two generations. My father fought against the Ranger mine and today ... we are fighting against the Jabiluka mine. Jabiluka threatens to destroy our sacred sites, our connection to country, our life.'

Rio Tinto's subsidiary Energy Resources Australia (ERA) holds the Jabiluka mineral lease, and mines the adjoining Ranger uranium deposit. ERA has yet to see the Jabiluka mine become a radioactive reality; construction was stalled indefinitely in 1999. And according to public statements made by Rio Tinto Chairman Sir Robert Wilson the Jabiluka mine won't proceed without the consent of traditional owners. ERA, however, continues to evade the call from environment groups and the Mirrar people; for a legally binding commitment to honour its parent company's position, and rehabilitate the mine site. 'We want Rio Tinto and ERA to put that promise in writing' Margarula states. Until they do, Rio Tinto's claim to good corporate citizenship will continue to look like a big fat furphy. EVE VINCENT


Sandy Scheltema

Louis Porter

REMEMBERING IRAQ

It was March 1991, the Gulf War had ended and Saddam Hussein was launching an aerial attack on his own people to suppress a civilian uprising. Ali Mirza Mohamad was 10 years old. He and his family escaped Iraq for Iran, and eventually Australia. Ali is now 21 and living in Melbourne, where he studies aeronautical engineering, practices the Shi'a Jaafary faith, and hangs out in a small flat in Toorak with his mates. He told his story to MARNI CORDELL.

'I was born in Iraq in 1981, at the beginning of the Iran-Iraq war, and spent the first six months of my life in the Nassirya prison, because my mother was being held there for 'anti-government activities'. My father also spent the first five years of my life in prison, for refusing to join the army. After he came out, he had to go underground. I remember we used to call him a female name and changed eight houses in one year to prevent him being found out. My uncle was really strong and outspoken against Saddam Hussein's regime. He was put in prison 25 years ago and we have not heard from him since the late eighties. My mother's two brothers were also taken to prison at the ages of 19 and 17 in 1980 and have disappeared. My grandfather died under torture in front of his four sons. Even now that Iraq is free from Saddam, we have not heard anything from so many friends who disappeared in the 1980s and 90s.'

The Iran–Iraq war spanned the first eight years of your life, ending not long before the Gulf War began in 1991. What do you remember of the first Gulf War? Was your family involved in the subsequent people's uprising?

Things changed dramatically in Iraq during the first Gulf War. Saddam became really weak and the people tried to use the opportunity to overthrow him. I remember, I was in Karbala at the time, and the people overtook the city and the government buildings there. Even some armies were turning on him.

At that time, without the use of aircraft, Saddam could not have come back, because he was almost finished. The main cities of the north were already taken by the Kurds, and then when the south rose up, most of the southern cities were in the people's hands. There was a no-fly zone over Iraq at that stage. But then something happened and it was [suddenly] okay to fly helicopters. I don't know if they meant to crush the uprising or not; but this is what happened. All the time it was a no-fly zone, and then they allowed a special case.

Under the terms of the Safwan Ceasefire Agreement, which put a formal end to the first Persian Gulf War, all of Iraq was a no-fly zone. This prevented the Iraqi regime from moving its troops fast enough to quell the uprising. The regime was wary, however, of moving its elite troops by road in case allied aircraft attacked them, so Iraqi generals approached their US counterpart with a request to allow the use of helicopters as safe passage for the Republican Guards. Their request was promptly granted. They then proceeded to quell the uprising with customary brutality. It is estimated that 200 000 Iraqis were killed.

I remember three aircraft came to Karbala. The people were waiting for them, and they hit one of them. I was really young, you know, but I was watching.

After that [the Iraqi army] took the co-ordinates and started bombing the city with heavy artillery. They took all of the city, combing it, for everything. Just to scare everyone off. There were people who resisted, but I remember most of them got killed.

They bombed for eight days. On the fourth day they came and said: 'Okay, now we're not going to bomb, so the people can escape'. But as soon as [the people] went out, they started bombing again. During that period a lot of people escaped, and a lot of the resisting people got scared and threw their weapons down and ran away.

After that, people who had stolen things [returned them], everyone sat at home. I remember some of our really good friends, a whole family of 15, got wiped out in the random bombings. All of them died except for one. The whole family.

My aunty, my uncle and my cousins were heavily involved in the uprising. Most of my family was already wanted for years of not attending the army, most of them had death sentences [hanging over their heads], so we had to escape. Our house was also a base during the uprising where wounded people were treated. I remember there being grenades in our drawers. I don't know if you know but there are two types of grenades. We were kids, but they still talk about it, so it still registers. There is a defensive one and there is an offensive one. One of them explodes immediately and the other takes time before it explodes. I remember all of these things.

What was life like for a child in Iraq in the 1980s? What kind of memories do you have of your childhood?

The trouble that my parents — the old people — were going through, didn't really affect me. Even though we went through stages where I barely survived, I wasn't aware of [the gravity of] it. Now, I think back and think if I was there, I would be scared, of course.

I was ten when we left Iraq for Iran. We lived there for five years. I studied; I learned a new language. But life in Iran was hard, because my father had to support a big family, and the economy was bad. So we applied for Australia and got accepted, I think, as political refugees.

What is your opinion of the recent war against Iraq, and of Bush's justifications for waging a battle against Saddam?

What do I think of the war? I'm against killing innocent people, but not against overthrowing Saddam Hussein. However, the purpose of the war is something unknown to me. I know one thing for sure though: the

Louis Porter

American Government, the West, France, Germany; these are not humanitarian organisations.

I was surprised, because many of their moves were very strange. Like, you know how Germany and France were opposing the war, allegedly? Well I got phone calls from people in Kuwait, saying that German commanders were in the battlefield. So I'm saying, is it true, what they're saying, or is it a game?

What do you think of Australia's involvement in the war?

I think by default, they're involved. For most people, for human beings in general now, morality is a secondary issue. The first thing is personal interest. For example, if I have money in your account, and you're doing something bad to someone else, of course I'm not going to waste my money and stick by the one who's being persecuted. Of course I'm going to look out for my interests first. And I think that's all Australia is doing.

I'm impressed that you can be so understanding about that Ali; many Australians were angry about the war themselves, and they didn't even know anyone in Iraq. You still have friends and family there, you know people who were directly affected by this war, how can you be so philosophical?

My opinion is that the governing of earth is something that's difficult for humans to work out by themselves, and that is why the world is not at peace. When people don't listen for instructions, people don't know their lines; so I will always cross my line, and attack you, because I'm seeking my own pleasures, or my own comfort, at the cost of you. Why? Because I was never given any instructions to stop me from doing that. That's why I think religion is important.

Religion teaches us that humans can't force humans. That's the thing that most people don't understand. And most people, even from my own culture, [argue with] me because they misunderstand this point. Some people think that if there is a nation that is peaceful but of a different religion, they should fight them, until they force [their own] religion onto them. But that is not Islam, because God says in the Quraan that there is no compulsion in religion.

Your religion has obviously taken a bad wrap in the mainstream media in Australia since September 11, 2001. The media still uses a very divisive set of terms when discussing Muslim and Arab people. What do you think of this coverage?

I think there are a lot of words that are being used in the wrong way, and people are not asking for any explanation. For example 'fundamentalist' means someone who follows an original idea. And [the media] is saying the Taliban are fundamentalist Muslims, which means, if you follow the original Islam, you will end up like this. Indirectly by doing this they are attacking Islam.

'Extremist' is a misused word too. If you accurately follow your religion, is that extremism? In fact I think extremism in that sense of the word is a good thing — if you're extreme in judging yourself, extreme in stopping yourself from hurting others.

What has happened is that the religion has been changed, not that it's being followed in an extreme way. There are some Muslims causing trouble, sometimes even in the name of the religion, but when you talk to these people, they miss out on the basics of the religion. They're practically not Muslims, they're just by name. Surely [to judge a religion] you need to judge its scriptures, not [the behaviour of] individuals.

I believe it's not religion that creates barriers; it's people. The actual religion should not be a barrier. Some wars happen in the name of religion. People kill each other, shouting 'We're defending our religion'. But what kind of religion are you defending? Allegedly these ideologies [can be justified by] all of the religions, but I say no, these ideologies are not in the religions. Because why would God prefer one nation over another?

This thing is in my culture too, and I'm fighting it. People say that I am going against the religion, history and the scriptures [by arguing this point]. But I tell them that it's a culture — not the religion — that I am challenging. ●

MARNI CORDELL is a freelance writer and editor of *Spinach7*.

THE FREE TRADE TANGO

AREN Z. AIZURA investigates the implications of cosy trade relations between Australia and the US on the local culture industry.

Australians at the Cannes Film Festival in May this year would have been proud to represent their country. *Crackerbag*, by first-time feature director Glendyn Ivin, won the Palme D'Or for Short Films. Unlike recent years at the Oscars, it's not often an Australian film wins any kind of prize at Cannes. The Meditteranean sun provided just the right light in which Ivin and his producer could bask.

The same week, in similarly balmy Hawaii, diplomats mingled, champagne glasses in hand. The cause for celebration: a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between the United States of America and its little brother, Australia. Chief negotiators Stephen Deady and Ralph Ives, the Australian and American representatives respectively, held a chipper press conference. Initial negotiations for the quickest free trade agreement negotiated anywhere in the world were right on schedule. 'Genuine and good progress' had been made.

The word 'negotiations' seems to confirm Australia's entry into the realm of serious global politics. But like the phrase 'a level playing-field', it implies a position of power that Australia does not necessarily enjoy. This is why the mention of 'culture' and 'the audiovisual industry' in these negotiations has galvanised the Australian film, television and arts industry into full alert. Although no one knows precisely what effects the FTA will have on Australian culture, hardly anyone thinks those effects can be good. For those who make culture in Australia, the FTA reasserts the question of 'Australian national identity'; how does locally-produced culture feed this identity and what would happen if local 'products' were to vanish?

Prelude to the embrace

Australia's history on trade under both Labor and Liberal governments places it firmly in neo-liberal territory. Diplomatically isolated from Asia, with a politically-entrenched fear of invasion by non-white, poverty-stricken people from the north, the Howard government has instead tried to maximise its ties to other English-speaking nations. Read: the United Kingdom and the United States. These nations also happen to be among the most enthusiastic advocates of market deregulation. An FTA with the US is supposed to secure permanent diplomatic relations. But while Australian negotiators have points they want to score, the American agenda is clear: to 'address' barriers that US exporters face in the Australian market. That is, to remove them.

What does this mean in terms of culture? Australia currently has content laws for free-to-air television that stipulate that 65 per cent of primetime content must be made in Australia. To remove 'trade barriers' would mean changing those content laws. The other issue is government subsidy, or funding. Australia has one of the world's most supported culture industries. Many artforms (including the growing film industry) need funding to survive. Under a free trade agreement, this might be regarded as 'unfair' support.

The US negotiating team neglected to mention 'the audiovisual industry' until the first official negotiating meeting in March; only two more negotiating meetings are scheduled before the end of the year, by which time both parties would like the deal sewn up. Thus far, the Howard government's response to queries for more detail has been anything but reassuring. 'Obviously you can't rule anything in or out...' Communications Minister Richard Alston told ABC television in May (the only comment he's made about the FTA), 'but all of the indications to date tell me that we won't be having to make the sort of concessions that some people are afraid of.'

But since March, media coverage on the issue of 'culture' in the free trade agreement has exploded. A number of arts and entertainment organisations formed the Australian Coalition for Cultural Diversity (ACCD). Together with the Australian Film Commission (AFC), they've been lobbying very hard. The AFC even held a press conference at the Cannes Film Festival about free trade. The Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance recently launched a campaign called 'free2baustralian', featuring spokespeople such as Gary Sweet, from *Stingers,* and other primetime celebrities decrying an American take-over.

Around the time of the Hawaii negotiations, Richard Harris, spokesperson for the ACCD and the Executive Director of the Australian Screen Director's Guild, serendipitously discovered a polling survey about the FTA in which 71 per cent of respondents said they would oppose it 'if there were less Australian films and television shows on our screens'. With film and television identified as the second 'big consumer issue' after pharmaceutical benefits, Harris considers this result 'gold-dust'. 'That sort of polling is what matters to the government', he says. 'They don't really care if the [film] production industry is squealing... they care about general, normal Australians caring.' It looks like he might be right. The government has re-emphasised its commitment to 'protecting' Australian screen culture. In May, negotiators proposed a solution to the problem: a 'standstill' on free-to-air content laws. This would mean that current content and arts funding laws would be set in stone.

The protected market

The US's tactical power in matters of cultural trade can only be understood by comparing the differences between the two nations. Australia's film and television industry is, in trade jargon, a 'protected market'. Last year, Australian films grossed a mere five per cent of box office takings. Film production is subsidised by a range of organisations — funding bodies, film schools, SBS and ABC commissioning.

Arts funding is an even more complex web of support. As well as propagating new and experimental works, arts funding bodies at local, state and federal

Scenes from *Walking on Water*

The corporate fear of box-office flops and rating disasters, would only be heightened in an environment where American companies had monopolised television channels and film distribution. It's vital that the creation of new books, music, artforms, television programs and cinema does not depend on their saleability.

levels keep established industries solvent. Mainstream book publishers, for instance, regularly receive funding from the Australia Council to publish new books. The Australian Opera, Australian Ballet and Sydney and Melbourne Symphony Orchestras receive large pieces of the annual federal-funding pie.

By contrast, US arts culture sustains itself through a network of philanthropic trusts and private investment. Hollywood's immense cultural and economic power means most American film production companies don't need government subsidies. Rather, Hollywood applies political pressure on its government. Frank Morgan, a media lecturer at Newcastle University and a veteran cultural lobbyist, remembers when Jack Valenti, the head of the US Motion Picture Distributors' Alliance, visited Australia on trade talks in the 1980s. Valenti met with then Arts Minister Barry Cohen, who remarked that Australia was not big enough to be a serious economic threat to the US; his aim was only to protect Australian culture. 'Valenti dropped his voice to a sinister register and said, "Minister, if your culture needs protecting, it probably doesn't need to survive." '

When asked how a standstill on current culture laws would work, Richard Harris is sceptical. 'A standstill is as bad as any other option', he says. 'It leaves the government with no room to move — to deal with changes in technology, changing cultural practices, changes to the ways that people use the media or the ways in which media is produced.' Digital television and pay television would have no content quotas — which might be troublesome if all television becomes digital as tech gurus are prophesying.

This is not only a problem for large-scale broadcasting. Arts practice, too, changes with technology. The Australia Council's New Media Fund is only a few years old; interactive computer games are the hot new artform (see 'Escape From Woomera'). Its Community Cultural Development Fund is only two years old, and over the past three years a number of youth initiatives have been added to the annual funding round. A funding standstill under the FTA would mean less adaptation to new artforms by funding bodies — who are, after all, supposed to be encouraging innovation in the arts.

Harris says the standstill option has been sold to the Australian government as a concession. It's part of a game in which the US collects FTAs with minor countries as 'trump cards' in preparation for its assault on a bigger fish, the European Union. He believes the only viable alternative is a 'cultural exemption', pioneered in Canada, which means that any cultural product is exempted from the terms of the agreement. Chile and Singapore, both recent signatories to free trade deals with the US, have gained cultural exemptions. But just like a 'standstill', cultural exemptions are plagued with problems. All cultural products must be listed in the agreement, and if any aren't, they're fair game for trade.

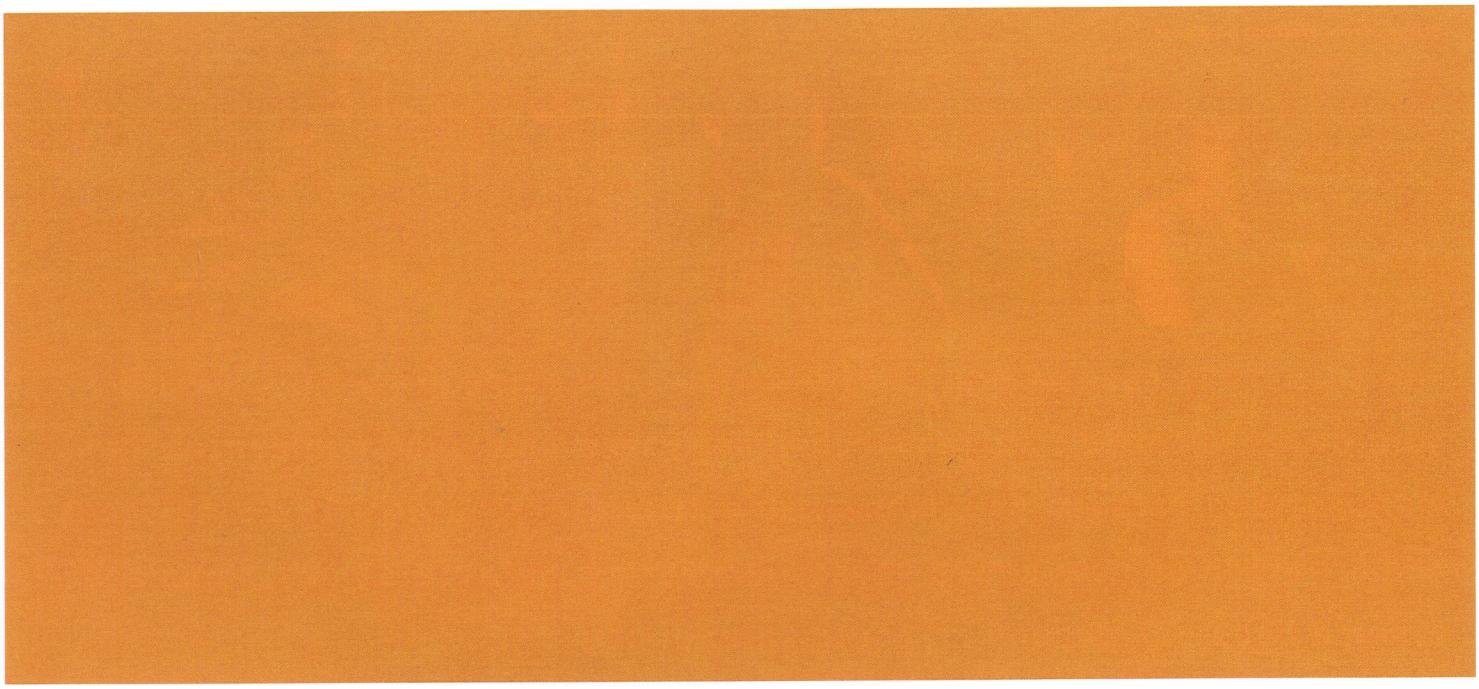
Domestic terror

Frank Morgan traces concern about the position of the US on screen culture back to the early 1990s, and cites the Uruguay round of General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade talks. 'The Americans wanted to make commercial broadcasting the standard. They saw any kind of government funding for broadcasting or the arts or film as an intervention in the primitive capitalist trading environment they preferred. Any government spending on the arts would be in breach of international law. Although this was opposed, notably by the French, the US never renounced its position.' Morgan points out that while media and communications culture in the US is the fastest-growing industry, the US economy is looking fairly desperate in 2003. All good reasons to be cautious.

But understanding the issue as wholesale US cultural invasion neglects the entire story. These trade deals are taking place in a domestic context, with a federal government hell-bent on opening up as many markets as it can to foreign investment. The Howard government's assault on cross-media and foreign media ownership laws is an example. Currently, 25 per cent of a newspaper and 15 per cent of a television station can be foreign-owned. Cross-media laws mean that a corporation (foreign or domestic) cannot brand itself across every broadcasting medium available. Labor, the Greens and the Democrats have opposed every media ownership bill Alston has presented to parliament thus far. Eventually, one supposes, a deal will be brokered; the government only has to wait for the correct lever. And Alston continues his campaign to disable publicly-funded television. His tactics have recently become so shameless as to accuse the ABC Radio program *AM* of 'anti-American bias'.

'Digital convergence' is another worry. By 2025 it's likely that the boundaries between internet and television will have disappeared; cable will be ubiquitous, feeding interactive digital broadband into most middle-class Australian homes. 'Free-to-air' television may be obsolete. It's worth paying attention to who will own the means of cable distribution; telecommunications is another market the Howard government wants to 'open up' to foreign investment. American access to the Australian telecommunications sector is one of the government's prime bargaining chips in the FTA.

If 'regulation' has any meaning to the Howard government, it's less about the protection of Australian-made culture, and more about policing the content that streams through the lines. It's no accident that internet pornography legislation and a beefed-up censorship board have been high on the Howard agenda. Security and surveillance of culture are far more important to the conservatives in power than supporting a healthy diverse local media culture.



Whose identity?

Then there's the question of what constitutes Australian culture. The unabashed nationalism of slogans like 'free2baustralian' seems to gloss over the enormous differences within the culture industry, and in politics generally, over what 'Australian-ness' means.

When the political Right defines national identity, many culture-makers have professed, with pride, to being 'un-Australian'. National, cultural products like *Home and Away, Blue Heelers* and *Neighbours* depict Australia as those who've never lived here might imagine it: white; placidly suburban (or better, rural); full of good Aussie blokes and sheilas. Australian identity on these terms is often a nostalgic fantasy of the good old days before Aboriginal land rights, non-Anglo immigration or angst-ridden, uncertain modernity. Perhaps local content quotas contribute to this misconception of Australian cultural identity? Here we might find ourselves in uneasy company with right-wing critic Imre Salusinsky, who wrote in *The Age* in May 2001, 'the ideological buttress that for so long supported local-content quotas — industry assistance, based on national identity — has gradually crumbled, exposed as pure ethnophobia, and as devoid of substance as the rantings of Big Kev.'

And yet, most of the 2002 AFI Awards went to films that defied white, middle-class narratives. *Beneath Clouds, Rabbit-Proof Fence, Australian Rules,* and *The Tracker,* stories about Aboriginal Australians, even if they weren't all by Aboriginal filmmakers, all won significant awards. Importantly, these films are not definable in terms of the identities they produce. All are complex and engaging works. *Beneath Clouds,* especially, explores what it's like to be caught between cultures, negotiating an autonomous space that shifts in relation to different situations.

Walking on Water (2002) is about the death of Gavin, a man with HIV who's asked his best friends to assist him to die at home. There is no Anglo-centrism here, the two main characters are Greek. But neither does the ethnicity of the protagonists direct the narrative. Instead, conflicts arise between the rural, straight-laced family members who arrive at Gavin's deathbed and his cosmopolitan friends, both straight and gay, who live with their own tensions and desires. Directed by Tony Ayres, a Melbourne-based director, *Walking on Water* took two years to finance through a combination of grants. SBS Independent, the Adelaide Festival and the NSW Film and TV Office all contributed funds. Ayres believes he has been fortunate enough to work with people who have always believed in what he can do as a filmmaker, but that the 'marginal' subjects he chooses mean his films won't be widely shown. 'The kind of work I'm making would not be possible if [film] subsidies didn't exist', he says.

This is where the liberal model of the 'free market' falls flat. Culture-making is fluid and resilient; thousands of years of attempts at censorship by the Roman Empire, the Catholic Church and various governments have shown that whatever laws are made, people will keep making whatever kinds of culture they need. And just as it's impossible to regulate, so is culture impossible to commodify. The corporate fear of box office flops and rating disasters would only be heightened in an environment where American companies had monopolised television channels and film distribution. It's vital that the creation of new books, music, artforms, television programs and cinema does not depend on their saleability.

Coping strategies

Perhaps one of the biggest problems with this FTA is the fact that nobody's questions have been adequately answered. Aboriginal artists and cultural producers are asking how free trade will work for them, especially with regard to intellectual property and copyright. This is an area the negotiators have not even begun to address.

The elaborate mating dance of free trade negotiations will continue all year, and if we're lucky, well into next year too. That an FTA will ensue seems inevitable, and culture may very likely be traded off. What will creators do if cultural subsidies are affected? Tony Ayres is unequivocal on this point. 'I would have to locate my career internationally — either by moving to the United States or the UK.'

In the event, it might be time to think through strategies to cope with our newfound American intimacy. More independent film co-productions? Simultaneous industrial actions with American film industry workers to demand comparable working conditions and wages? American philanthropic trusts sponsoring new Australian television shows? If this is not what we want, now is certainly the time to fight. ●

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is soliciting submissions from interested individuals and organisations about all aspects of the FTA. To find out more, go to http://www.dfat.gov.au

AREN Z. AIZURA is a Melbourne writer, editor and zine-maker.

Shuuichi Endou

IN 50 YEARS TIME THESE KIDS' ISLAND HOME OF TAVALU WILL NO LONGER EXIST.

STEMMING THE TIDE.

The people living on a tiny collection of islands known as Tuvalu will see their homeland covered by the rising Pacific in their lifetime. DOMENICA SETTLE reports on a new kind of refugee.

Somewhere in the blue expanse of the Pacific Ocean is a tiny smattering of islands known as Tuvalu, blips on the map east of Papua New Guinea and north of New Zealand. In 50 years time they will no longer exist.

Nestling on the edges of the endless red sand of central Australia are a smattering of refugee detention centres, carefully placed where there is a lot of space and not many people to see them. Debate about Australia's treatment of refugees has swept across this vast country during the past two years, as detainees use self-harm in an attempt to be heard, and the Australian Government comes up with strategies like the 'Pacific Solution' in an attempt to move the problem to anywhere but here.

In 2001 – the year of the Tampa and the 'children overboard' affair – the federal government approached the government of Tuvalu about the possibility of processing refugees there. But this collection of Pacific islands was dealing with refugee problems of their own. In October 2001, the New Zealand government agreed to accept the entire population of Tuvalu over a period of time – effectively as environmental refugees.

'Environmental refugees' is a term that is creeping slowly into use to describe those who have been displaced from their homes by environmental change, whether that be climate change, deforestation or pollution. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies estimates that there are now 25 million such people across the globe, making up over half of the world's total refugee population. Yet according to the United Nations they don't exist.

Environmental refugees, like people who can no longer survive in their birthplace due to famines, the construction of giant dams or a paddock full of land mines, don't meet the UN definition of a refugee as someone with a 'well-founded fear of being persecuted' in their home country. Without recognised refugee status, environmental refugees can't access what limited help is available.

While the inhabitants of Tuvalu are facing a very immediate problem, with the waters of the Pacific rising around them, rising sea levels are not the only result of climate change. In 2000 Robert Watson, the then chairman of the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change addressed the fact that many parts of the world had been suffering from major heat waves, floods, droughts and extreme weather events. 'While individual extreme weather events cannot be directly linked to human-induced climate change, the frequency and magnitude of these types of events are expected to increase in a warmer world', he stated.

In 1998 one such extreme weather event hit Nicaragua, in the form of Hurricane Mitch, which killed 10,000 people. For Josefina Ulloa Velasquez it wasn't just a climate statistic but very real: 'Everyday following the storm, we worked from 5am to midnight helping people who were so desperate they sometimes fought over food. My defenses are low now and my nerves have been shattered by the horror of it all... Now conjunctivitis, micosi and diarrhoea are setting in on people. In my family eight people have been

Who are environmental refugees?

There are three 'categories' of environmental refugees, also known as ecologically displaced people:

- those fleeing non-human created natural disasters, such as earthquakes.
- those fleeing human-induced causes, such as the conversion of primary forestry or agricultural land into plantations, or the construction of dams, which displace communities.
- those fleeing indirect human-induced causes, such as the greenhouse effect. Sometimes referred to as 'climate refugees', this is the fastest expanding category.

Environmental refugees may either be internally displaced within their country, or seek asylum in another country.

Environmental refugees are currently not recognised under UN structures. This is despite the fact that according to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies more people are now forced to leave their homes because of environmental disaster than because of war.

Source: Friends of the Earth

killed. And in my mother's family 40 have been killed. Good friends, that is all I can write today. What can be said from my family?'

Two years after Hurricane Mitch, Nicaragua was still paying the cost. The United Nations Environment Program had predicted that climate change could destroy the livelihoods of people around the world dependent on farming, fishing or forestry, and Velasquez was able to confirm this. She described the plight of farming families that survived the hurricane only to end up in urban Santa Maria: 'Because they are agrarians', she explains, 'they have no means to generate an income in an urban slum. Some women go to work... as domestic workers, but they've lost their autonomy and their identity.' Without deliberate moves to prevent climate change, greater numbers of people will suffer similar losses.

The Australian government, for its part, claims to be enthusiastically combating climate change: 'Australia is at the forefront of efforts by nations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions', argues Environment and Heritage Minister David Kemp. Yet Australia has been consistently obstructive in international climate negotiations. In 1997 Australia successfully argued for the right to increase instead of decrease emissions as part of its Kyoto Protocol target, and stood by George W. Bush's withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol in 2001, while most of the world was busy expressing its horror.

Australia is the world's largest exporter of coal – one of the worst greenhouse gas polluters – and have been marketing coal-fired power stations to Asia. And although the Labor Party has been vocal in supporting the Kyoto Protocol, in Victoria where the party is in government, it has been continuing to support the state's dependence on coal.

By the year 2050 the number of environmental refugees worldwide will have reached 150 million, according to Norman Myers, a population biologist and visiting fellow at Oxford University. But the pain of displacement will not be shared equally. According to the United Nations, the people who will suffer most from climate change will be those from poorer nations that – unlike Australia – have 'fewer options for responding'.

'There is no justice in this', Patrina Dumaru of the Pacific Concerns Resource Centre told a forum on ecological debt in Melbourne in 2001. 'The greatest emitters of greenhouse gases are unwilling to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions... in the name of protecting an over-consumptive and unsustainable economic system, while millions of people in the world, not just atoll islands but also in Africa, in Asia... have to pay the cost.' Dr. Ricardo Navarro of El Salvador, who is chair of Friends of the Earth International, agrees. 'We could say in general terms that some people in the world, who mainly live in the North [first world], use cars and consume petrol, and others, mainly in the South [third world], suffer floods and death as a result.'

In Tuvalu, saltwater is already contaminating the drinking water; in the Marshall Islands farmers have resorted to growing crops in old barrels to avoid the islands' saline soils, and the Cateret Islands off Papua New Guinea are facing evacuation. A resident of the island nation of Kiribati protests against the fate that awaits her as an environmental refugee: 'We can't just move to another country,' she says. 'There I have no land. There I am no one.'

Like the political refugees out of sight in our deserts, environmental refugees will suffer displacement and loss when their homes become uninhabitable. But our responsibility to the environmental refugees of the future is not one born of pity. Australia should be tackling climate change, not to prevent another flood of refugees from being shuffled around our detention centres and pricking our conscience, but because we are one of the world's worst polluters, and won't be the ones paying the cost. ●

DOMENICA SETTLE has been giving large chunks of her time to Friends of the Earth, on a voluntary basis, for many years. She's worked on climate change and corporate globalisation issues, among others. At the moment she is excited by graffiti in Bogota, Colombia, which says 'let's leave pessimism for better times'.

ANAT

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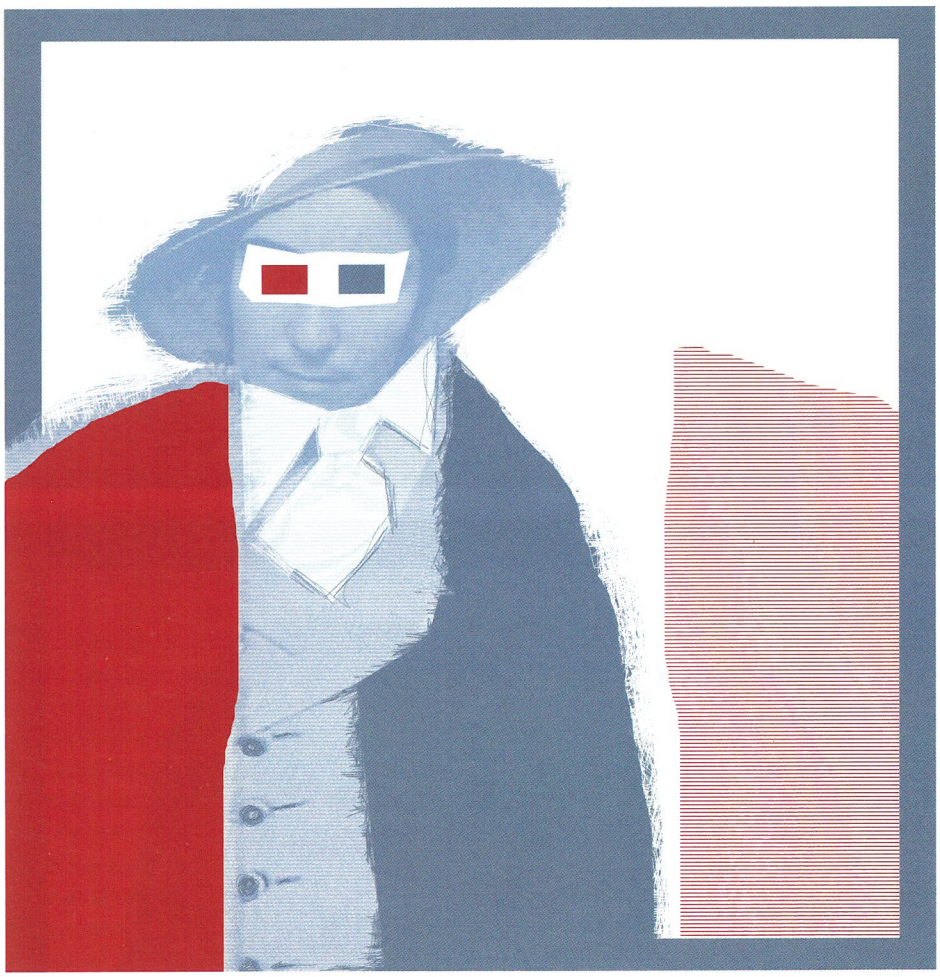
Augustus Earle (1793–1838) *A Native of the Island of Tucopea* [c.1827]
watercolour on paper; 24.8 x 22.2 cm
National Library of Australia

LEFT RIGHT OUT

MARCUS WESTBURY



Whether it's guerilla actions for refugee rights, mass online protests or international festivals, the most obvious thing about the kids of today seems to be that they're organised.

ABOVE: PIP SHEA, BY PIP SHEA.
RIGHT: SEAN HEALY, BY SEAN HEALY.

But what do they do for a day job? A few cascading windows behind the flyers and provocative e-mails, and much the same skills are being applied to graphic design, coding, freelance writing, temping in call centres or any of a myriad of temporary, contract, part-time and offcut jobs of the new economy. While an international network of twenty-somethings is attempting to overthrow global capitalism, at union headquarters, they're desperately pondering how to organise those that seem to be so incredibly capable of organising themselves.

Senior union figures, such as the ACTU's Organising Centre director Michael Crosby, are ominously predicting that if current trends continue, union membership in Australia could disappear altogether by 2010. The changing nature of the workforce has shifted employment from union strongholds, such as manufacturing, to information technology, tourism, media and services. Companies have downsized, laid off and restructured. They have culled their permanent workforces and created an ever-expanding new layer of temps, outworkers, contractors, freelancers and consultants — who are frustratingly unwilling to turn up in their thousands from nine to five so that the traditional methods of workplace organisation can be applied to them.

Ken McAlpine, National Industrial Co-ordinator for the NTEU acknowledges the difficulties unions have faced in reaching the new workforce. While recognising the need for unions to evolve, he is not confident that the union movement will be able to fully accommodate the needs of outworkers, freelancers and casuals at any point in the foreseeable future. He argues that the casualisation of the workforce itself is a conscious attempt by business to downsize the role of the unions. 'The union movement has to concentrate on next week. The whole zeitgeist is that capital is moving that way to make it harder for the union movement. The main reason you casualise the workforce is to keep the unions out', he says.

McAlpine points out that unions, with a few exceptions, are traditionally organised around workplaces rather than individual workers, and have great difficulty in connecting with and organising workers away from that environment. In new industries or new classes of work, the lack of a trade or craft

mentality that unites and defines employees makes it almost impossible for unions to intervene in the traditional manner. In order to protect the rights and pay rates of workers, unions need to be able categorise different types of work, and this is often not possible in new industries.

He compares the fields of IT, media, design and the other emerging information economy jobs to the more traditional and highly unionised film industry. While there can be little consistency in the job description of a multimedia developer from day to day or organisation to organisation, 'In the film industry, everyone knows what a second assistant director does.'

Pip Shea is a multimedia developer currently working for the ABC on a short-term contract. At 27 she has worked full-time, part-time, casually and freelance. Applying her skills across a range of artistic, personal and social projects, Shea has most recently been involved in the tactical-media group *boatpeople.org*'s campaign for refugee rights.

In recent years, *boatpeople.org* famously projected a large-scale image of a tall First Fleet-style sailing ship accompanied by the words 'boat people' onto the Sydney Opera House; and a tribute to the hundreds of asylum seekers who drowned on the SIEV-X onto a human screen on the banks of the Yarra in Melbourne. She has also produced an award winning personal website, and is currently collaborating with people around the world on a blog-based site called *Discordia*.

Shea speaks glowingly of her first employer, yet has an armoury of anecdotes about the blunt end of the new economy. A failed dotcom start-up she worked for went broke owing her and other employees a month's worth of wages. While the money was ultimately recovered from the administrators eight months later, none of the employees were union members. Another company she worked for collapsed spectacularly, leaving employees stranded at offices around the globe.

Shea says she has neither encountered, nor considered joining, a relevant union: 'I don't even know the union that I could be a member of; I don't know anyone in my industry that is a member of a union.'

While Shea acknowledges that there are times when she desires greater security, she disagrees with the assumption that flexibility and casualisation is something of a sham designed to marginalise workers. 'The sort of person that I am, the skills that I have, and the sorts of things that I like doing are all conducive to me freelancing.'

'I am quite sure that I wouldn't be freelancing if I hadn't been retrenched twice in 12 months. Now I can't imagine my fate with anyone but myself. I think it's a really good experience to lose your job. It's a good lesson that security is kind of elusive.'

Sean Healy is a freelance writer and video artist who has also worked extensively — for little or no money — in community projects and event organisation in Brisbane and Newcastle. At 31, he has undertaken many projects with commitments that went way beyond the nine to five of most workplaces, but has never had a permanent full-time job. While the idea of a five o'clock cut-off and a clearer distinction between work and play is appealing, his primary concern is flexibility. 'I prefer the capacity to do multifaceted things, the capacity to be involved in a range of projects, and I would miss the chance to collaborate in my own time.'

Healy was a founder of the Newcastle community organisation Octapod, and the annual *Electrofringe* media arts festival. He was also a key Australian organiser of an environmental and social justice campaign against Shell for its actions in Nigeria, organising protests, boycotts and a national speaking tour of Nigerian activist Komene Famaa.

While he admits that he feels exploited every week by his employers, Healy points to the narrow focus of trade unions as a major reason why he has never contemplated joining one. The issues in his life tend to blur work and play, the global and the local, and he is more concerned for the workers who are producing sweatshop Nike shoes than his own employment conditions.

Despite co-founding and organising an annual gathering that brings together thousands of independent media-makers and activists, Healy is only vaguely aware of the union that covers the field: 'I have never had anyone mention it — ever. I've never heard of anyone involved in media production that has ever approached or been approached by a union; or [known] anyone who is a member.'

McAlpine argues that people such as Shea and Healy are the exception rather than the rule, and that the vast bulk of workers are actually much worse off in the new economy. Many who believe they want flexibility, he argues, are actually caught up in a Hollywood ideal that encourages everyone to think that they are masters of their own universe, when they are actually rearranging their lifestyles to suit the needs of business. 'Short-term contracts and working from home exacerbate whatever the market conditions are. If you are in demand, conditions of work don't apply to you. The consequences can only be seen in a recession.'

Both McAlpine and Shea do agree, however, on a larger problem that has prevented the marrying of the new organisers with the old: the old structures aren't ready to respond to their demands, needs and agitation. McAlpine points out that it probably costs more for unions to service and assist employees away from structured workplace environments than they would ever gain in membership fees. 'Objectively, there are good reasons why unions have not been relevant [to that demographic]. They're not a paying proposition.'

Shea points out that part of the problem is a clash of old style union solidarity with the personal responsibility and more individual ethos of the new generation of workers. 'Unions rely on black and white parameters all the time. All workers, and all rights standardised. Across the board rules and outcomes. We're probably in the too hard basket — arriving at the table with our own rules, desires, and egos.' ●

MARCUS WESTBURY is the artistic director of the *Next Wave* festival and a former organiser of the *LOUD, noise*, and *This Is Not Art* festivals.

PAPUA MERDEKA

WORDS AND PHOTOS BY BEN BOHANE

'If someone comes into your garden and steals your pig, does not tell you or offer any compensation, then you have a right to kill them. That is tribal law.'
COMMANDER TITUS MURIP,
ORGANISASI PAPUA MERDEKA / FREE WEST PAPUA (OPM).

It was late at night when the elders of Geselema village woke me, beckoning me to the main room of the Men's House. Outside, pigs grunted and the faint sound of mouth harps twanging in nearby huts was carried in the cool mountain air. As oil lamps flickered I could make out twelve old and weather-beaten faces peering at me through the dark. There, laid out on the floor in front of me, were twelve items. Slowly, reverently, Silas, who was wearing a wallaby headdress, picked up each item to explain it to me. 'This is a koteka (penis gourd) for men; this is assgrass (grass skirt) for women; this is pandanus leaf for making thatch roof; this is a carved arrow for hunting cassowary.' He paused lovingly on each item, seeing that I had taken it in. At first I was a bit bemused. This was all pretty self-explanatory, I thought. Why had they bothered to make a ceremony out of it? But it slowly dawned on me that they were displaying the sum total of their material wealth as a culture. These twelve simple items had sustained generations of people for thousands of years.

Silas picked up two other items which were displayed as if additions to their culture. One was a chunk of rock with bright little flecks on it, representing the wealth of copper and gold that lay in their earth. The second was a bible, emphasising the most important foreign addition to their culture, an addition that they prized highly but was still mysterious to them. Looking into Silas's eyes there seemed something questioning, confused almost. When he and the others spoke, they implied that all this had been enough to sustain them over the years, that they had lived freely according to their ways and had been able to defend their traditional lands. No longer. Their lands were being exploited by others for fabulous wealth, their people were being attacked by Indonesian troops and they could feel themselves being squeezed out of their traditional land. The look on their faces betrayed a sense of fear, of sadness, for their very future. Less than 100 kilometres away from our hut, the 24-hour-a-day operation of Freeport copper and gold — the largest gold mine on earth — was grinding ore in the night. The contrast between this billion dollar, space-age mining project and the twelve bare items laid out on the floor in front of me could not have been more extreme.

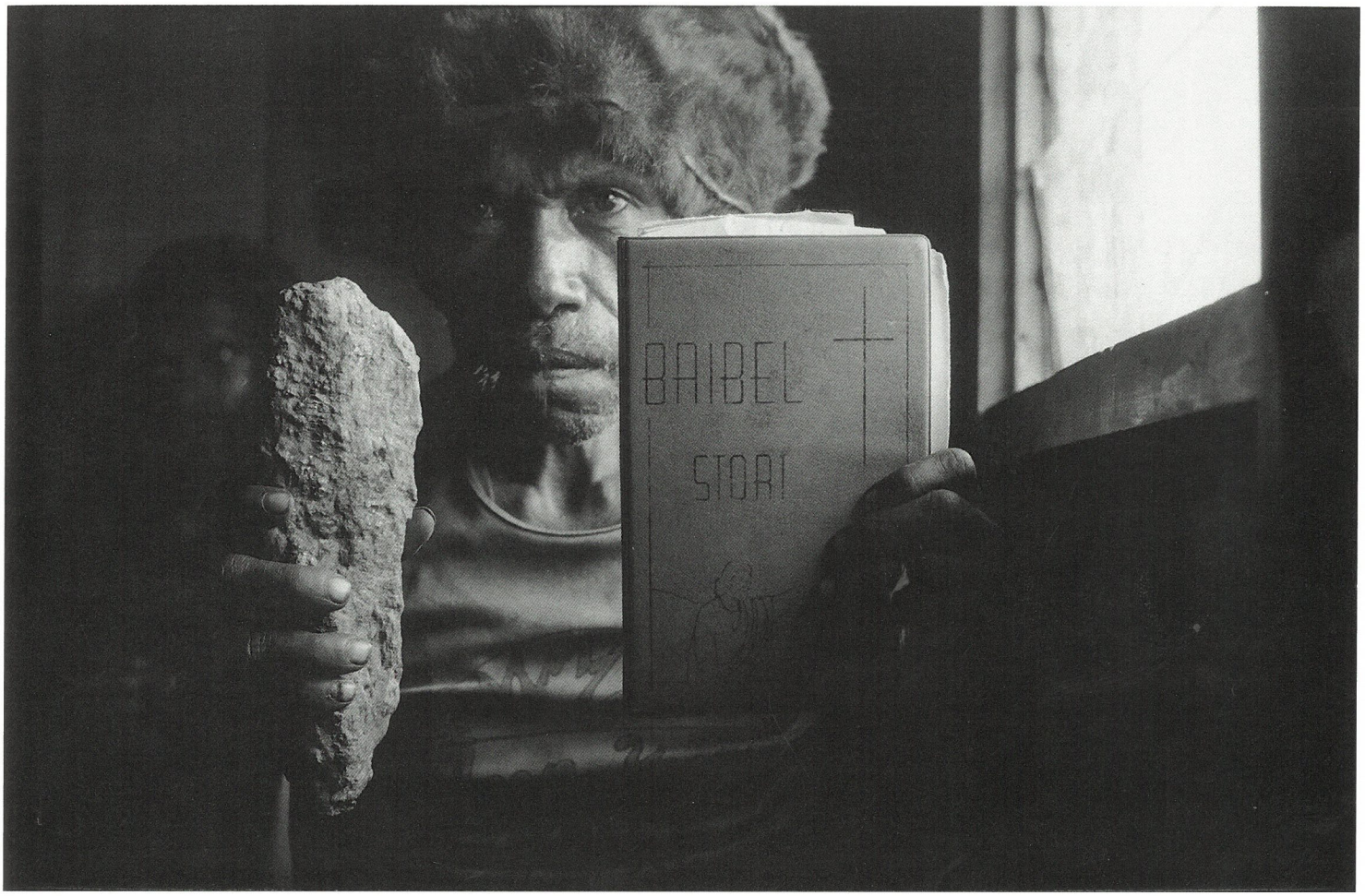
'We must have our independence', Silas said finally, and everyone nodded their heads in silence.

Sometimes a big issue has to be stripped back to its simplest. In November 1996 I found myself in the highlands of West Papua, trekking for six weeks with the Central Command of the OPM to interview some of the leaders of this long-forgotten war. In these remote and otherworldly mountains I heard Commander Titus Murip break down the incredibly complex international geopolitical status of West Papua into the simple prism of tribal law.

Freeport and the Indonesian military were continuing to literally and metaphorically enter their gardens and take their pigs without offering any compensation. Therefore the OPM, defending the interests of local people, had a right to kill them. That is tribal law and the essence of their struggle.

For 40 years groups of OPM guerillas have roamed the jungles, raised their Morning Star independence flag, attacked Indonesian army patrols, and educated villagers about the political history of their country and the need to liberate it. Few conflicts on earth have been so comprehensively ignored by the media and regional governments; church groups and non-government organisations claim more than 100 000 people have perished during 40 years of Indonesian 'occupation'. What has been going on in this vast and ancient land, which lies just spitting distance from Australian shores? Dark murmurs of atrocities and dispossession have been seeping out for decades now. Only rarely has West Papua been thrust into the international spotlight.

In the mid-1960s West Papua gained fame for swallowing up a young Michael Rockefeller, heir to the largest fortune in America, when he disappeared on an expedition looking for decorative skulls taken by headhunters in the Asmat area. A failed uprising in the Baliem Valley in 1977 gained attention when it was learnt that the Indonesian military (TNI) had napalmed whole villages and shot hundreds of people. As a peace gesture, the military later introduced



poisoned pigs to unsuspecting villagers. In more recent times, the hostage-taking of four British, two Dutch and a German in 1996 for four months made international headlines. The TNI were handed a public relations victory when OPM Commander Kelly Kwalik refused to hand over the hostages to the Red Cross and two Indonesian hostages were killed.

Then, in November 2001, the President of the Papuan Presidium Council, Chief Theuys Eluay, was found strangled in his car after attending an Indonesian Kopassus military banquet. A state-sanctioned assassination is all but confirmed. The Chief had attempted a peaceful, diplomatic approach to the independence issue, but some within the independence movement believe the struggle will only be won through more forceful means. Having taken something of a backseat when the Papuan Presidium Council was formed in 1999, the OPM is now likely to continue its guerilla activity regardless of what happens in the diplomatic arena.

Although short on weapons, thousands have been trained in the fundamentals of guerilla war. What makes the OPM different from many other liberation groups is its decentralised nature and lack of a unified command structure. Ethnic rivalries, lack of telecommunications and geography all play a part in this. Essentially it has been left to regional commanders, sometimes in coordination, often not, to conduct operations as they see fit. Many have claimed the mantle of Supreme Commander over the years, from Seth Rumkorem and Jacob Prai, to Nicholas Jouwe, and today, Matthias Wenda and John Koknak. Three main command areas have been most active in recent decades; Central Command led by Kelly Kwalik, Titus Murip and Daniel Kogeya; Northern Command (along the northern PNG border) led by Matthias Wenda and Southern Command (southern PNG border) led by John Koknak and Bernard Mawen. In the international arena, some of the prominent spokespeople for the movement include Franzalbert Joku (based in PNG), John Otto Ondawami and Rex Rumakeik (both based in Australia). Then there is the tireless human rights campaigner John Rumbiak, whom some have said is a potential Nobel Peace Prize candidate.

For millennia, Papuans had been lords of their own domain, repelling any invader while maintaining elaborate trade relationships with neighbouring tribes and faraway kingdoms. Tribal war and violence were a regular feature of traditional life, but they were regulated so that 'payback' was never excessive. The idea of war as annihilation of your enemy, the hallmark of many conquering western and Asian armies, seems a largely foreign concept to many Papuans of the interior. But since the United Nations Act of Free Choice handed West Papua to Indonesia in 1969, Papuans feel they have become essentially a subject people. Today their lands remain invaluable to outsiders, providing one of the last great resource bonanzas left in the region. For Indonesia, West Papua provides land to cultivate and resettle its poor from the overcrowded islands of Java and Sumatra. Plus, the returns from Freeport; Indonesia's single largest taxpayer.

Having travelled with numerous resistance groups over the years, what has struck me about the nature of West Papuan resistance is that, despite their isolation, lack of military equipment or external support, their determination is as real as any other national liberation struggle in history. It has become a cliche to say that the OPM is 'a state of mind' for most Papuans, but it is quite apparent that the struggle is seen as a deeply spiritual one as much as a political one. Some observers have remarked that the independence movement has taken on an almost cargo cult-like fervour. This is not to be dismissive; the reverence with which the Morning Star flag is unfurled is itself an offering to the gods and many successful independence movements throughout Melanesia have had their roots in Messianic movements. The assassination of Chief Theys has ensured his place in history as but the latest incarnation of the prophet

ABOVE: A VILLAGE ELDER HOLDS A CHUNK OF ROCK (SYMBOLISING THE WEALTH OF COPPER AND GOLD) AND A BIBLE, TWO OF THE MOST SIGNIFICANT INTRODUCTIONS INTO WEST PAPUAN LIFE.

Mansren, who is constantly reborn in West Papua to help liberate his people.

The greatest challenge may prove not to be the Indonesian military but the ethnic rivalry within West Papua. What unifies them is a perceived sense of collective injustice under the status quo. Although many are 'uneducated' their humanity tells them that what continues to be perpetrated against them is fundamentally wrong and that they deserve better. The word 'dignity' pops up often in conversation, as does a desire to express their identity freely. Aware of the odds stacked against them, including the juggernaut Indonesian state and its allies in Canberra and Washington, there is little outward display of fear. They are prepared to take on the might of the Indonesian military with bows and arrows and a handful of bolt-action rifles. What balances the odds is their bushcraft and ease in this terrain. They say yes, the Indonesians have the guns, but we have the land — the jungles, mountains and rivers, which hide and sustain them.

The mountains surrounding Freeport and the Baliem valley contain the highest peaks in the Pacific. On my way to Geselema and the other villages I visited, gazing out of the cockpit window at the expanse of jungle and mountain, it was not hard to see how limited the campaigns against the OPM in this vast green sanctuary must be. In the past, the campaigns have generally been in 'payback' form: if the OPM ambushed an Indonesian army patrol or attacked the mine, the Indonesian military would often respond by selecting several Papuan villages and wiping them out. Such scorched earth policies have only further entrenched Papuan resentment.

At several points we flew through mountain gorges instead of over them, before the gentle corkscrew landing onto a grass strip carved out of the side of a mountain. Once on the ground I met Daniel Kogeya, the military Commander for Central Command. He dispatched some letters into the bush and within a day or two we trekked into the bush, hoping to interview the elusive Kelly Kwalik and other leaders. We began trekking with a unit of eight guerillas, plodding through dense jungle and eucalypt forest, up large river systems with fast, cascading water. Nearly a week later we were still moving along narrow trails and rope suspension bridges when we came to a ridge where, on a clear day, they say you can see Australia. The men rested on their bows, standing around smoking bush tobacco, gazing out to an azure expanse of sea. When we reached the designated village there was no sign of Kwalik or any leaders, so I was ceremoniously put in a hut to wait. And wait. Days turn into weeks, weeks into a month. Where are they?

Finally, one night, they ushered me into the Men's House where a circle of leaders were sitting. Daniel Kogeya broke the silence. 'First we want to apologise to you for waiting for so long, but we wanted to travel with you for one moon before we felt we could trust you. There has been much killing and Kelly Kwalik and others have lost many of their families, so we have to be careful. But now we want to open our hearts to you.' With that, one of the men seated next to me, Titus, who had travelled with me the whole time, scribbled on a piece of paper and handed it to me. It said 'Kelly Kwalik!' At the time I had no reason not to believe him. After all, there were no photos in existence of Kwalik and no journalist had ever ventured into the Central Command area before. Later I learnt that he was not Kwalik but Commander Titus Murip, Kwalik's deputy who had decided to take on the role of spokesman in this situation.

Titus Murip, speaking through an interpreter, said, 'We have heard about Amungme people who were forced to move down into the lowlands away from the mine. Within two years nearly one third of them had died from malaria. We mountain people have no resistance to malaria.' In Freeport's 2.5-million hectare concession area, which stretches from present operations across the entire Carstenz mountain range to Ok Tedi in PNG, the mountain people see two agendas at work. One is to relocate them from the mountains so the range can be mined. The second is that by moving them, the OPM is denied sanctuary. Murip insisted that his people would fight to remain in the mountains, threatening to kill any mine surveyors who entered their lands. 'The mountains are our mothers, our ladies. Freeport is married to our mountains but they have never paid the bride price',

he said. Their list of grievances is extensive, from pollution concerns at the 100 000 tonnes of mine tailings dumped into the river every day, to anger that less than 10 per cent of Freeport employees are local and generally do menial work.

Under Indonesian law there is no government obligation to pay compensation for traditional land taken 'in the national interest' and no legal avenues to stop it being taken away. 'There have been new concessions, new killings, new companies, but no one has asked the mountain people. The contract should be re-negotiated, with Papuan leaders involved.' OPM leaders say there have been numerous attempts at dialogue with the mine, which mine owners have usually rebuffed, despite attacks over the years, including the attack on slurry pipelines in 1977, which made headlines and cost the company millions of dollars.

The next three days were carnival days, filled with smoke and strange noises, apparitions of tribesmen in ghostly ochre and women splashed in the mud of mourning. For several days Amungme, Nduga and Yali people had trekked across 3 000-metre mountain ranges to reach this remote village in the heart of the Lorentz National Park. They had come to hear leaders of the OPM's Central Command speak and raise the independence flag. The men were naked except for penis gourds, smeared in pig fat and ochre colours, some in elaborate cassowary and bird of paradise headdresses and armed with spears, bows and arrows. The women wore grass skirts and carried children and bilum bags full of sweet potatoes.

The three days culminated in a military parade of 400 guerillas, a flag-raising ceremony and a speech by Murip and Kogeya. 25 pigs were slaughtered for a feast with taro, pumpkin and sweet potato. At night the makeshift shelters for a thousand guests became emporiums for elaborate storytelling and music, twanging mouth harps and string guitars rising above the cacophony of voices and fires. They believe that the spirits of their ancestors live in the mountains, yet, through the monsoonal rain and wild dances, I couldn't be sure if I wasn't also watching a ghost people, whose land falls under the shadow of Freeport's concession area.

After a rash of negative publicity relating to its human rights and environmental record, Freeport claims to have changed the way it operates, but most observers say any changes are largely cosmetic. Yet having watched every major mining operation throughout Melanesia come under attack from angry landowners, Freeport must be casting a nervous glance over its shoulder. Its owner, the Elvis-impersonating Jim Bob Mofitt from New Orleans, has found that his previously cosy links to Suharto and cronies are history. Meanwhile, the groundswell of Papuan nationalism only continues to grow. As Melanesians, there is no more emotional issue than land and they will continue to fight for it. At some point it must be left to the UN to peer into the black recess of its own soul to re-examine the sham vote it organised in 1969. It was the UN's first ever 'de-colonisation' operation and remains today one of the darkest stains on its history.

West Papuans will have their day in the sun. This is contrary to the political position taken by the international community at present, but history is ultimately with them. ●

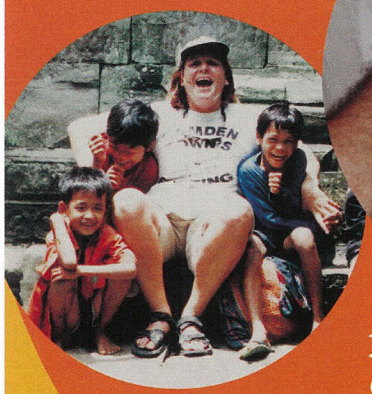
OPPOSITE: OPM PERFORM A WAR DANCE IN THE RAIN, CENTRAL COMMAND IN THE HIGHLANDS.
ABOVE: OPM RALLY IN THE HIGHLANDS.

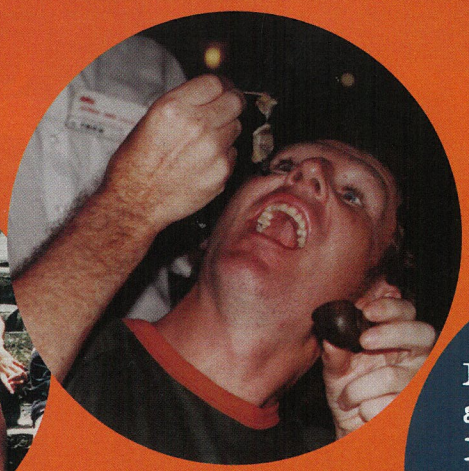
Ben Bohane is a freelance photo journalist specialising in the Pacific region. He has covered major conflict and political crises from West Papua and East Timor to Bougainville, the Solomons and Fiji. He is currently based in Vanuatu, where he is the editor of the *Pacific Weekly*, which he helped to set up in 2001.

Ben Bohane's contribution is an edited version of an essay from his recent book, *West Papua: Follow the Morning Star*, which he co-wrote with filmmaker Liz Thompson and Pacific historian Jim Elmslie. *West Papua: Follow the Morning Star* is published by Prowling Tiger Press, RRP $30.

Essential items to pack...

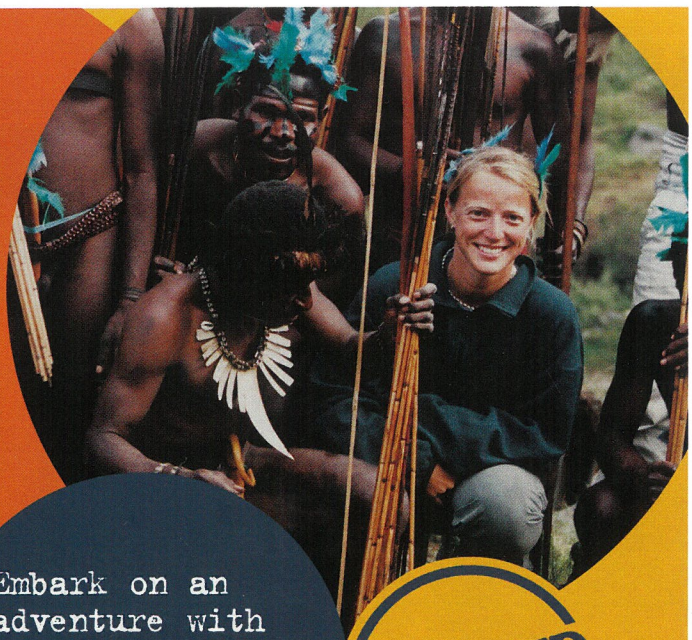
No 1: Your sense of humour





No 2: A strong constitution

No 3: An open mind



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COMING SOON...

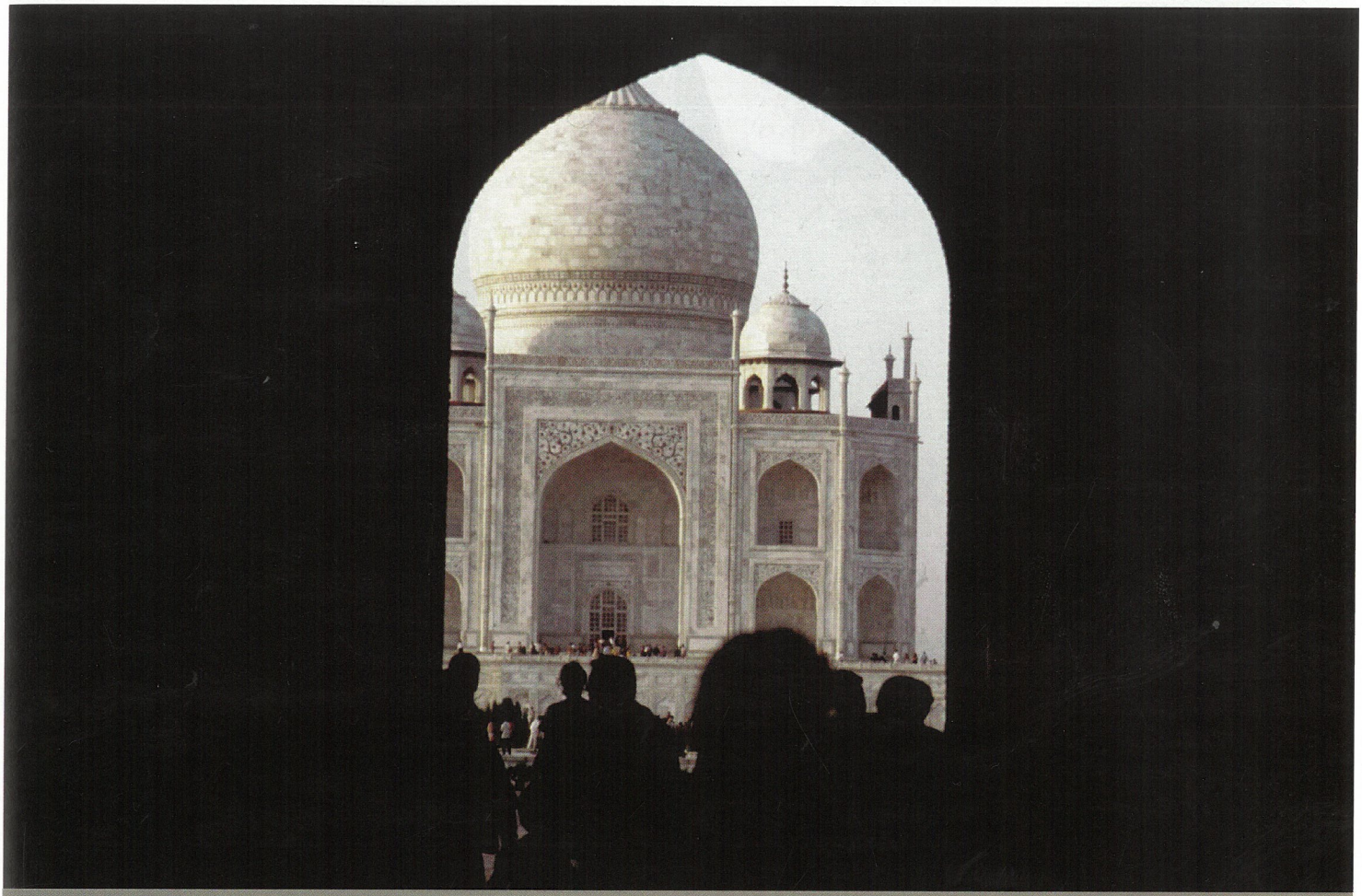
SPINACH7 BROADBAND

Over the coming months, SPINACH7 will be developing an online media channel that will complement the magazine.

SPINACH7 BROADBAND will contain short segments and more in-depth features about culture, art, issues and technology. Over time, we hope to host a variety of content that will make SPINACH7 BROADBAND the preferred home for net surfers searching for fulfilling media.

We are interested in stories from all over Australia and the Asia Pacific region. So, if you have an idea for an online segment or feature, contact us!

Check out www.spinach7.com for more information.



BEYOND THE FRAME

REFLECTIONS ON PHOTOGRAPHY AND STORYTELLING

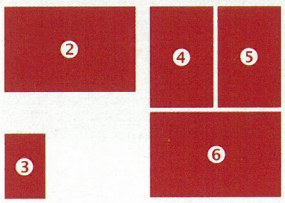
BY PETER DAVIS.

At the Taj Mahal I once watched a man lure tourists from their buses to a position where they could focus their cameras and capture the perfect picture-postcard image of that magnificent edifice. This man takes his work very seriously. He chalks out two footprints and encourages his captives to stand in them. Not only do the tourists do what he demands, they even pay him for the privilege!

I have a name for the interplay between this man and his customers. I call it 'trap dancing'. Sometimes it's funny. Occasionally it gets ugly. But the poignancy of this dance should never be underestimated. It's a dance that lures the visitor away from the possibility of original thoughts or expression and into the dominant agenda. I don't blame the tourist trappers for what they do, they are simply doing their job. They do well because so much tourism is about experiencing 'otherness', without leaving the cocoon of the familiar.

As a writer and photographer I have had the privilege of gaining access to other people's stories in many parts of the world. Some stories are uplifting and inspiring. Others are painful. Many are both. I am constantly reminded that in an increasingly globalised world, storytelling is crucial to the sustaining of identity. Deny the story and we negate the individual, the community and the culture. I tell stories with words and with pictures. But a photograph demands a language beyond the visual; I have chosen the following images as an example of the stories that exist within and beyond the frame of a photograph.

❶ THE TAJ MAHAL, INDIA 1994
This is the image that the tourist trapper didn't want me to take. Yet this is how I have experienced so much of India — as a complex canvas of shade and light with fleeting glimpses of magnificent edifices.



❷ FEEDING CENTRE THROUGH CAR WINDOW, ETHIOPIA 1995

In 1995 I was sent by Oxfam to document their work in Ethiopia — the Civil War was over but famine was looming. I took this picture as an illustration of how the media first encounters 'otherness'. From the comfort of an air-conditioned vehicle we gazed out through the window onto a confused and often alien world — a world shattered by conflict and pain. Our job was to somehow 'capture' and explain.

❸ BLIND ELEPHANT, SRI LANKA, 1996

His name is Raja. He was 47 years old when I photographed him in Sri Lanka in 1996. He's completely blind because someone shot his eyes out. Some people claim that he was used as target practice in the Civil War, others suggest that it was hunters seeking his tusks.

❹ MR SHAJE RAO, EARTHQUAKE VICTIM, MAHARASTRA, INDIA 1993

The earthquake that killed Mr Rao's wife and five children and destroyed his home also killed an estimated 10 000 people in less than 14 seconds. In Mr Rao's village of Talani 4 000 out of the population of 5 000 died. When he saw me he yelled 'Please, if you're from the media you tell the world what has happened here — there's nothing left, everything is buried. Who can I talk to?' Mr Rao survived because he slept outside to be with his sick cow. When I filed my story via a satellite phone the first question the newspaper editor asked me was 'Have any Australians been hurt?'

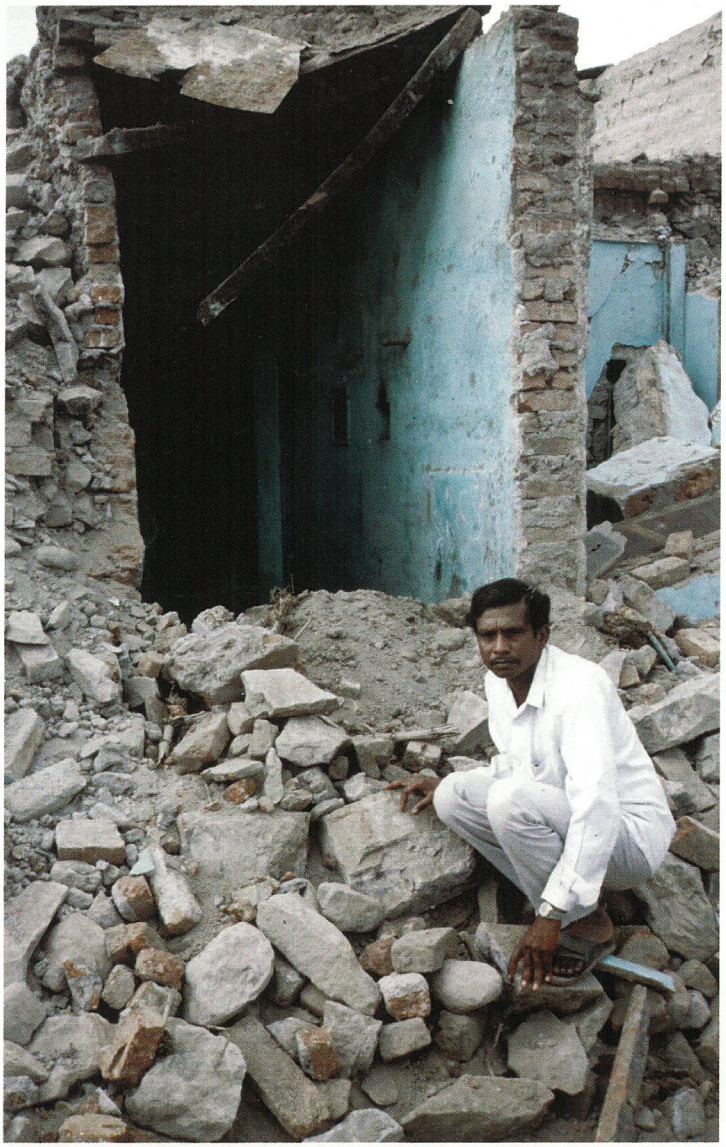
❺ TSAM CHOE AND VILLAGE CHILDREN, TIBET, 2001

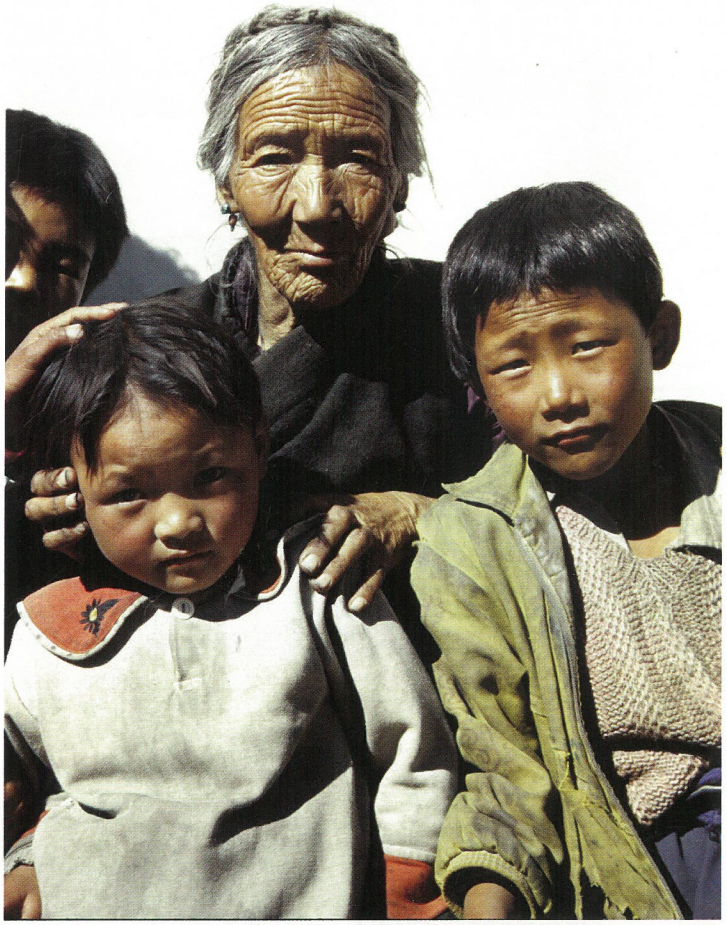
I was interviewing Tsam Choe for a magazine feature on rural Tibet. She has lived in her village for all her 71 years. After 20 minutes of talking with her I asked (via my translator) if I could take her picture. At that point she froze. She looked at my translator and said 'If he photographs me alone then people in his country will think that I live alone.' When some of the village children came into the frame, Tsam Choe relaxed and allowed me to take the picture.

❻ FEEDING CENTRE ETHIOPIA, 1995

I took this image as a conscious response to the cliched image of famine — that of the single child with distended belly. Famine is not just about failed crops. It's also about the politics of distribution. I wanted to show that the pain belongs not just to an isolated individual, but to a collective community. And I wanted to show something of the anger that accompanies pain — at least in the early stages before it reaches the mind numbing levels. I have no idea how many people in this image are still alive. ●

PETER DAVIS is a Melbourne-based writer/photographer. He lectures in non fiction writing and coordinates the Network of Image, Text & Technology at Deakin University.





PERSONAL AND POLITICAL

http://desip.igc.org

RIHAB CHARIDA presents 'The Palestine Report', a segment in the *Voices of Protest* current affairs program, on Sydney's Actively Radical TV (ARTV), which broadcasts Sunday nights on Channel 31. With other Arab artists, she also put together an exhibition called 'I Remember 1948', which opened in May of this year. Rihab talks here with MATTHIA DEMPSEY about her involvement in both projects.

'My involvement is personal and political. My father, with the rest of his family, was forced out of their village and made their way over the border to Lebanon, walking. Along the way my father, who was nine at the time, lost his family and was only re-united [with them] after 21 days. Like all of the other Palestinians they thought they were only leaving for a month or two. My father still dreams of returning to Palestine.

It is very engaging to hear a story first-hand from someone who has experienced it. Last year I asked my father to record his story for me because I was interested in learning more about my own history. While I was listening to it, I felt the need to make his story heard to other people.

I approached other Arab artists in Sydney that I knew would be interested in working on a project with me. Together, we organised an exhibition: I Remember 1948. The other members of the committee have had a lot more experience in media-making, it was their skills and experience that built this project.

We had a storytelling day, where three Palestinian elders told the stories of their experiences of *al nakba* ('the catastrophe'). *Al nakba* refers to the time when the state of Israel was established. We invited artists to attend and later create artworks based on the stories they had heard. Storytelling, the act of passing down stories from one generation to another, is very much what this project is about. It humanises the issue. They may be individual stories, but their stories speak for hundreds and thousands of people.

Corporate media is interested in stories that sell rather than information. Ideally, media should be about providing people with information. And it's important to hear individual stories — they bring life to the event.

The aim of The Palestine Report is to raise awareness about an issue that most people are misinformed about. Only in its full context can any situation be understood.

ARTV seeks to provide a voice for those in the community who are not heard or represented in the mainstream or corporate media. I started at ARTV in May, 2002. The producer of *Voices of Protest*, Jill Hickson, asked if I would be interested. She knew that I was actively involved in campaigning around issues to do with Palestine. I saw this as an opportunity to report what is happening in the occupied territories.

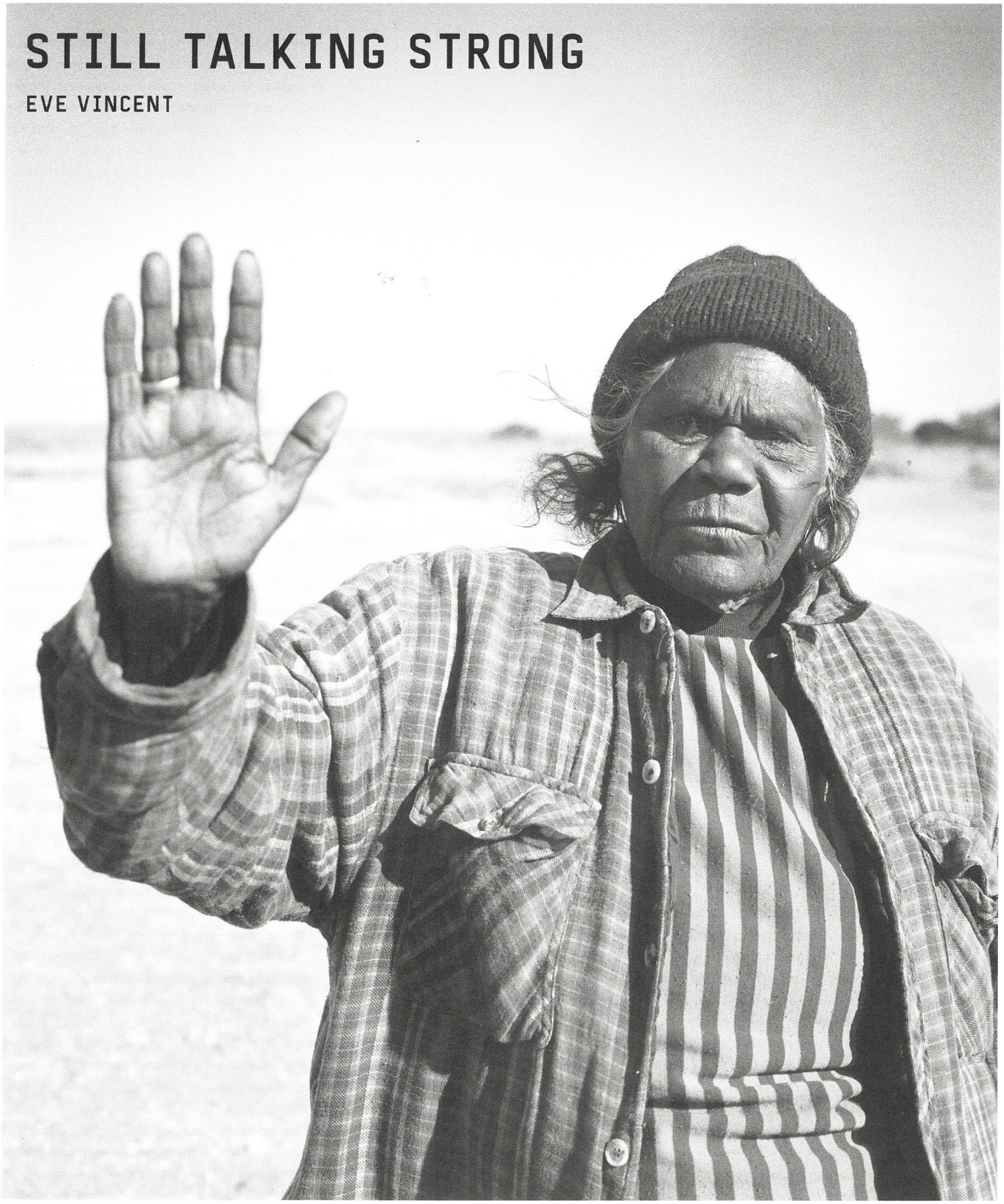
The Palestine Report usually covers the events that take place in the occupied territories each week. Reporting on what daily life is like for the Palestinians — arbitrary murders, checkpoints, road-blocks, humiliation, curfews, house demolitions, restriction of movement and poverty — is extremely important for anybody interested in understanding the situation. At times, the report is on a specific issue such as child imprisonment, education, poverty, settlements, or Israel's control of Palestine's water. We have had complaints from a woman who took the issue to the New South Wales Jewish Board of Deputies. They put in a complaint to the Australian Broadcasting Authority claiming that The Palestine Report incited racial hatred towards Jews and Israelis. The accusations were ruled to be untrue.

The Palestine Report definitely can't counter mainstream media, but I believe that any coverage is important and alternative media outlets provide information to a growing audience interested in getting alternative information.' ●

TOP: IMAGES OF AL NAKBA

STILL TALKING STRONG

EVE VINCENT



This award from overseas makes me feel strong. Even though I am getting old I will keep going. Still talking strong against the *irati*, the poison.
—Mrs Eileen Kampakuta Brown (AM), 2003 Goldman Environmental Prize Recipient.

Road-tripping is like storytelling. This highway, a narrative, which has a beginning in Coober Pedy, a destination — Sydney — and direction, west. The dry country out the window changes slowly as we move through it, as if we are turning over flat stretches of page. We pass pink salt-lakes, low scrub and dust, rocky desert with occasional eucalypts, farms, deserted railway towns.

All the while we are talking, telling, translating.
There is much singing.

'We' are seven women travelling together — four senior Aboriginal women from the western desert region of northern South Australia and three young non-Aboriginal 'greenies'. The elders, Eileen Kampakuta Brown, Eileen Unkari Crombie, Emily Munyungka Austin and Martha Uganbari Edwards, are representatives of the Kupa Piti Kungka Tjuta (KPKT), a council of senior women from Kokatha, Yankunytjatjara and Antikarinya countries. *Kupa Piti* is Yankunytjatjara for 'white men's holes'; the non-indigenous place name Coober Pedy is based on a transliteration of this description. *Kungka* means woman, and *tjuta* means many. The greenies in the driver's seat and squashed in the back are environmental campaigners Nina Brown and Emily Johnston, both based in Coober Pedy, and myself, a Melbourne-based campaigner.

The KPKT 'were born on the earth, not in the hospital. Born in the sand.' Brought up on the land, they follow their *Tjukur,* which is variously translated as 'Dreaming' or 'Law'. Their Tjukur tells of the Seven Sisters who travelled across the country, creating it.

We are 'seven sisters' we realise suddenly on day two of the drive — compelled to travel across the country to talk about plans for its desecration.

The KPKT was formed in 1995 to ensure the transmission of stories and knowledge; the continuation of cultural practices; and the maintenance of responsibilities to country. The KPKT explain 'We are the women who are fighting to keep the culture going. We've been ... teaching the people that lost the culture.' The Kungkas I am cruising with sing along to Slim Dusty and to Anangu (Aboriginal) country music. When a cheeky greenie slips a hip-hop mixed tape on, the clapping sticks are retrieved from under seats to pick up the beat, traditional song cycles begin, and we soon turn it down.

It is five years since the KPKT wrote a letter that began 'Dear Greenies'. 'We want help', it continued. In 1998 the KPKT had learned of the federal government's plan to build a national radioactive waste dump in the South Australian desert. Their call to greenies is now archived on the *Irati Wanti* ('the poison, leave it') Campaign website (http://www.iratiwanti.org). That letter marks the inception of a complex political alliance and mutual exchange built between the KPKT and environmental groups

PREVIOUS PAGE: MRS BROWN IN COOBER PEDY, 2002. Benjamin Storrier.
ABOVE: MRS BROWN, FEBRUARY 2003. Raffi Pandolfini.
OPPOSITE: (L–R) EILEEN UNKARI CROMBIE, EILEEN KAMPAKUTA BROWN, EMILY MUNYUNGKA AUSTIN, SYDNEY 2003. Nina Brown.

such as Friends of the Earth (FoE), Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF), the Conservation Council in Adelaide and, most closely, a support group called the Melbourne Kungkas.

The KPKT — invaluable leaders and respected figures within their own communities — had made a generous gesture, to share their life-stories and extensive knowledge with non-Aboriginal supporters. Gifted and patient teachers, the KPKT state 'Never mind our country is the desert, that's where we belong ... It's from our grandmothers and our grandfathers that we've learnt about the land. This learning isn't written on paper as whitefellas' knowledge is. We carry it instead in our heads and we're talking from our hearts.' One of the strongest lessons I have drawn from my involvement in the *Irati Wanti* Campaign is that the image of the desert as a dead and disused space is a cultural conception, with its origins in colonial narratives about a vast unknown. The KPKT instruct that the desert is not a blank space; it is a network of known places, densely overlaid with stories, meanings and histories. Furthermore, the desert is intensely alive. The KPKT's 1999 'Statement of Opposition' (to the proposed waste dump) urged: 'Listen to us! The desert lands are not as dry as you think! Can't the Government see there is water here?' The KPKT are concerned about the potential for radioactive leaks into the vast underground water sources that sustain life in their desert home.

Over five years of tireless campaigning it has become clear that 'the Government has no ears'. Or, as Mrs Brown says, shaking her head, they 'keep their ears in their pockets'. On May 9, 2003, Federal Environment Minister Dr David Kemp gave the final go-ahead for the dump, to be located at one of two selected pastoral stations, Arcoona Station or Andamooka Station. The project is extremely unpopular with the South Australian public and has been legislated against by South Australian Labor Premier Mike Rann. The federal government is now moving to override the state government's opposition and use the federal Land Acquisitions Act (1989) to push ahead with its plan. A state and federal showdown looms, with each hoping to outsmart the other.

On May 7, 2003, the KPKT faxed a letter to Kemp in anticipation of his final approval: 'We are the Culture Women and we are worried about the *tjitji tjapu* — all the little kids coming up after us. But we are worried about everyone's kids, not just our own.' The KPKT's concern for 'the kids coming up after' is characteristic of all their statements, which move insistently between past, present and future. Members of the KPKT witnessed British atomic tests in the South Australian desert in the 1950s and 1960s, and hold strong memories of this time. Exposure to radioactive fallout devastated Aboriginal communities in the region, both people living in traditional camps and itinerant workers at pastoral stations. Heritable health effects have been passed on; the test's legacies still affect communities today.

The vehemently anti-dump South Australian newspaper, the *Advertiser* has made much of this point — South Australia, having endured the indignity of British atomic tests on its soil, is keen to throw off the tag of 'the nuclear state'.

The KPKT then, are survivors of an extraordinary history, yet they continue to 'talk strong' in the present, and articulate a generous vision for a shared future. Their resolve received international recognition on April 15, 2003, when KPKT founding members Mrs Eileen Kampakuta Brown and Mrs Eileen Wani Wingfield were awarded the prestigious international Goldman Environmental Prize. The annual prize is given by the American philanthropic organisation, the Goldman Foundation, to grassroots environmental 'heroes' from six geographic areas around the world, and is the largest of its kind. In a joint statement issued after the announcement of the prize the pair commented, 'Our job is to care for the country; doesn't matter who it is, Aboriginal, non-Aboriginal. We've been caring for it properly and talking about everything. We don't want this [waste dump]. We all have to get together and look after this country ... We are strong, old ladies. We will keep fighting.'

Mrs Wingfield travelled to San Francisco for the official prize ceremony while Mrs Brown made her own momentous journey, to a prize ceremony in Sydney. As the Kungkas described to Kemp, 'We have just come back from a big trip to Sydney because two of our Ladies won [the Goldman Environmental prize] for all the work we have been doing to stop the dump and save our culture. We went in the car across the highway. The same one those trucks carrying the *irati*, the poison, would come.'

Most of the waste to be dumped in the desert would be trucked from a planned nuclear reactor in Sydney, which was approved for construction in 2002 and will be Sydney's second reactor. FoE's national anti-nuclear campaigner Bruce Thompson, points out 'If this radioactive material is as safe as the federal government claims, then why can't it be stored at its source? And if it's not safe, then why risk transporting it vast distances? It's a crude and expedient solution to a complex problem, driven by the push for a new nuclear reactor in Sydney. A reactor that's not needed, and not wanted. '

We drive through towns on the radioactive waste transport route — Broken Hill and Dubbo — whose local councils and communities have been organising in opposition to the dump. We drive, very, very slowly, along the winding Blue Mountains road. 'We know that road now', the KPKT explained to Kemp. 'It's too dangerous.'

The Sydney ceremony was attended by former Goldman Prize recipient Bob Brown and many other famous and not so famous greenies. Members of the Melbourne Kungkas, FoE and ACF were all present. Christine Anu presented the award and Mrs Brown's grand daughter Karina Lester translated the speeches of Mrs Brown, Mrs Austin and Mrs Crombie.

Following the award of the Goldman Prize in April, *Irati Wanti* Campaign coordinator Nina Brown was also recognised, receiving the Peter Rawlison Conservation Award on World Environment Day, June 5. 'Up here [in Coober Pedy] they call me Greenie *Mula*' Nina says, 'which means true Greenie, and that keeps me going. This award is a great honour, as is working with the Kungkas and their families who have devoted so much time and energy teaching me about their culture and country.'

'I will keep on talking', Mrs Brown repeated in her acceptance speech. 'I will keep on talking.'

And it's this that keeps us driving, exhausted and quiet for the moment, along that 'road we know now', like a story we know by heart, and home. ●

EVE VINCENT works on the *Irati Wanti* Campaign and is a writer, researcher and editor of *Spinach7*.

A VISIT TO THE VILLAGE THAT NO LONGER EXISTS

JOHN MARTINKUS

Last December, I visited a small rebel-held village near Jeunib, in the Bireuen district of Aceh. This area, 200 kilometres from the capital Banda Aceh, has been one of the worst hit in the Indonesian military's latest offensive against the Free Aceh Movement (GAM), which began on May 19 this year. At the time of my visit, this village comprised more than 300 heavily armed GAM fighters, and a civilian population who appeared to welcome their presence on the grounds that GAM provided protection from military harassment. Now, GAM fighters have left and civilians have been displaced; forced into an overcrowded refugee camp under the control of a military with an appalling record in arbitrary killing and abuse.

On first appearances, the strategic main road between Banda Aceh and the rest of Indonesia was firmly in the hands of the Indonesian military (TNI). Every few kilometres they had placed petrol drums in the centre of the highway, forcing traffic to slow. Trucks with armour plating, armoured personnel carriers and the occasional US-built Saladin-armoured car, patrolled the road. The burnt-out and derelict houses lining the carriageway were overgrown with weeds, the smaller towns deserted — except for the military and police posts that would regularly halt and search all traffic.

But one kilometre past the last post the picture started to change. As we drove further east, two men on a motorcycle flagged down our car, pointing to a side road running off through rice paddies. We turned down it and were soon joined by a crowd of men in military fatigues carrying AK-47s, M-16s and RPGs, who threw two planks of wood over a wide dug-out ditch in the road so that our vehicle could cross. When we reached the nearby village, heavily armed men waved at the car. Children crowded around as we came to a stop and a tall, Acehnese man in civilian clothes and carrying a portable satellite phone in one hand came forward to introduce himself as the local Free Aceh Movement commander, Commander Darwis.

Just a week after my visit to this village a ceasefire was signed for the province of Aceh. Brokered by the Geneva-based Henry Dunant Centre for humanitarian dialogue (HDC), the peace talks were hailed by Jakarta as leading to the disarmament of GAM and the renouncement of their claim for independence.

But in the field GAM showed no readiness to either give up their weapons in the short term, or renounce their eventual goal of independence. 'How can I let my men disarm', Commander Dawis asked, 'when the army of Indonesia, the biggest human rights abusers in the world, are still chasing my men? Jakarta makes a trick. The dialogue is not relevant to the real situation in Aceh.' While reports on Aceh today describe GAM fighters as marginalised insurgent forces, without the support of the Acehnese people, and predict that they will be easily defeated, during my visit last December, the popularity of GAM was clear to see.

It is a well-known fact in Indonesia that the military receives only a quarter of its operational expenditure from the central government. The rest is made up from a combination of military-run businesses, extortion rackets and criminal activities. The financial burden imposed on the population by the military — a military that one foreign observer in Banda Aceh described as having a 'predatory role' in the province — has only increased support for GAM in the countryside.

During my visit, Commander Darwis described attacks by the Indonesian military that had recently taken place, which were all related to the extortion of money. On November 30, 2002, he recounted, TNI troops had rounded up all 300 inhabitants of the nearby village of Cot Plieng in front of the mosque, where they beat them and demanded money. Two days before, elite troops from the TNI strategic reserve Kostrad had rounded up the residents of another village, Blang Kuta, and shot three children, aged eight, fourteen and seventeen, in front of the crowd. According to Darwis, this occurred because the TNI had discovered villagers were paying more money to the Brimob — Indonesia's elite security police force — than they were paying to the army.

Darwis claimed to control 5 000 fighters in the district of Bireuen, and said there were 5 000 police and 8 000 Indonesian military in the area. Clashes between GAM and the authorities were frequent. 'If the TNI come to the villages and steal things like cars and motorcycles GAM will attack them', he told me.

All of the villagers I spoke to told me openly that they felt much safer having the GAM fighters there. They claimed that the local military did not bother them as much as they used to because their soldiers would be shot at every time they ventured near the GAM camp. It was a measure of how strong GAM were in the Bireuen area that locals turned out to watch them parade in the middle of the village. Nobody seemed concerned that there must have been more than 5 000 Indonesian military stationed along the highway within a ten-kilometre radius. At that time, Bireuen was a rebel-held area, and like many areas of Aceh off the main roads, the Indonesian military never used to venture there.

Now, of course, things have changed. According to the peace deal signed in December, the Indonesian

military were supposed to adopt 'defensive positions' in Aceh. Instead, they continued to patrol and extort money from the population, and just months after I was there, in March and April this year, militia groups backed by the military attacked two of the regional offices of the HDC, who were monitoring the ceasefire. The HDC withdrew all of its observers to the capital Banda Aceh, and then out of Aceh as the peace process fell apart. Following last-minute talks in Tokyo, in which GAM representatives reported that Indonesia was not serious about preventing the return to war, the full-scale offensive in Aceh began.

On May 19 this year, the Indonesian armed forces launched a large offensive aimed at wiping out GAM altogether, and the Bireuen district I visited has been one of the worst affected areas. According to Indonesian authorities, 50 000 soldiers and police are now stationed in Aceh — which has a population of four million. Local NGOs, however, say the true figure is anywhere between 60 000 and 70 000.

More than 17 000 people have been internally displaced as the TNI attempts to empty villages of people so that they can then go in and attack GAM.

OPPOSITE: BEFORE THE RECENT WAR AGAINST GAM, FREE ACEH MEMBERS - MEETING HERE IN A LOCAL SCHOOL - WERE ABLE TO ORGANISE AN EFFECTIVE CAMPAIGN IN THE MORE REMOTE AREAS OF THE PROVINCE. John Martinkus.

ABOVE: HEAVILY ARMED GAM COMMANDERS LINE THE ROAD IN THE BIREUEN DISTRICT OF ACEH, DECEMBER 2002. John Martinkus.

There are no reliable figures on casualties among civilians. Human rights workers have been kept out of the area and foreign journalists are not able to enter the province because the Indonesian visas issued to them exclude Aceh. Local Indonesian journalists are under heavy pressure from the military to report only their version of events. Local radio and press in Aceh have been banned by the military from publishing or airing any statements from GAM. The small village that I visited in December last year is now virtually non-existent.

And yet it is unlikely that Indonesia's forces will ever truly crush the Free Aceh Movement. Before the recent offensive, conflict between GAM and the military in Aceh had already claimed roughly 10 000 lives since the independence movement was formed in 1976. More than 1 700 people were killed in 2002, mostly civilians. In the Bireuen area, Commander Darwis told me that he had lost nine fighters in the previous year, while more than 100 civilians had been killed in his area.

More than 100 GAM fighters paraded with an impressive array of weaponry as we left the camp after my visit. They confidently escorted our vehicle all the way back to the main highway, fully armed and wearing Indonesian camouflage uniforms with the GAM flag insignia. Oblivious to the passing traffic, they waved their guns in the air and rode in circles on the tarmac before disappearing. Within a few minutes we were already slowing down for the first of many Indonesian police checkpoints on the main highway back to the capital.

Although Aceh has been the site of special military operations since GAM was formed, until May of this year, there did remain large parts of the province in which the TNI's presence was minimal. Re-taking those districts appears to be the aim of this latest offensive. However, in many of those areas, the civilian population sees GAM as their protectors, and Indonesia as the invaders in a country with a history of fighting any attempts to be colonised. The Dutch fought a war in Aceh for 30 years and never really won. No matter how many civilians the Indonesian military kill in this latest battle, they will probably only succeed in creating more angry recruits, who won't stop fighting until Aceh is independent. ●

JOHN MARTINKUS is a freelance journalist who has covered conflicts in Indonesia since 1995. He is the author of *A Dirty Little War* and the *Quarterly Essay: Paradise Betrayed.*

WATCHING OVER YOU

JEFFREY SHELL & RYAN HIGGITT

Innovations in the computer and telecommunication industries — and the wide-ranging social acceptance of these technologies — have transformed the way we communicate, interact, and ultimately define ourselves. In addition to facilitating fluid identities, increased global connectivity has compressed time and challenged distance.

However, the impact of this transition has gone beyond interpersonal barriers. Corporations and governments can now operate in an international marketplace 24/7, without requiring a visible, physical presence. Due to increased competition cutting into profit rates, new forms of organisational efficiency and new business models are emerging, which often focus on niche markets. The late nineties assumption that a good idea backed by an internet presence would implicitly result in a successful business has been challenged by the stock market collapse. A good idea is no longer enough.

Corporations and governments need to know their public and what products they are interested in, be they tangible, service-oriented, or ideological. Having a limited physical presence greatly increases the difficulty of 'knowing thy customer'. Thus, special interest groups engage in a process of collecting and analysing, or 'mining' data, to reacquaint themselves with their potential consumers. This is the driving force behind a commodification of personal information, which is now frequently exchanged to gain access to goods, services and memberships to groups.

The pursuit of more efficient organisational processes, coupled with access to a wealth of information, has fuelled a process called Risk Management, where decisions are made on the basis of statistical reasoning. Briefly, the goal is to maximise the difference between the savings obtained by an action (which may be scaling down, removing or automating a process), and the cost multiplied by the probability of failure. For example, consider the process of automating policing by deploying surveillance cameras in public spaces. The assumption is that monitoring people from a distance will create the perception that law enforcement is ubiquitous, deterring potential rational criminals. If effective, a smaller number of police are required to handle the fewer crimes being committed. Risk lies in the improbable scenario of a crime spree, where the remaining police squad might be too small to handle the situation. From the rational criminal's angle, panoptic (or all seeing) policing increases the probability of being caught, thereby reducing the perceived net gain obtained by committing a crime.

However, all seeing must not be confused with all knowing. The reality of these deployments is that human administrators apply human prejudices, disproportionately targeting visible minorities; leading to more arrests, and thus providing statistics that further justify systematic, institutional racism. Administrators also tend to focus on those whose behavior or dress differentiates them from the crowd. These cues may trivially identify them as 'deviant', or as members of subcultures assumed to have higher criminal potential, creating additional self-fulfilling prophecies. This practice encourages constrained, 'obedient' behavior, stifling alternative activities and promoting the marginalisation of difference in public spaces.

Another example of the effect of increased intervention is The Human Genome Project, which provides the ability to unlock information contained in genetic material. Although this initiative has provided a greater understanding of disabilities and diseases, its legal and ethical characterisation remains unclear and has been the subject of ongoing international debate. Accordingly, the control that interested parties may exert over human genetic material is equally uncertain. If a precise legal framework is not adopted, we could soon be living in an environment where everyone's genetic information is readily available, and where judgments are passed on the basis of genetic risk. Individuals could be turned down for jobs, insurance, adoption, health care, and other social services and benefits on the basis of this information, whether it pertains to genetic disease, heritage, or someone's idea of a genetic flaw. People's fundamental rights and freedoms could be compromised if law enforcement officials, insurance companies, employers, schools, adoption agencies, and many other organisations can gain access to these files 'in the public interest'.

Legislation that has increased the power and scope of state sponsored surveillance post September 11, 2001 has given these discussions newfound immediacy. These technologies are no longer hypothetical — they are either being deployed, or are well on their way. Even associations with members of groups perceived to engage in subversive behavior are being increasingly scrutinised by the electronic eye in the sky. Although there is not unstoppable inertia leading us into an Orwellian dystopia, we must be mindful of the trade-offs occurring as our governments strive to be more efficient, while seeking to improve security. Dismissing increased surveillance with meaningless rhetoric such as the popular 'I have nothing to hide, so why should I care', will further mobilise non-substitutable infrastructures whose value and desirability is dubious. At the least, we must recognise that new surveillance practices are challenging more than the amorphous concept of privacy. They are challenging our basic autonomy, as citizens and consumers. Although we embrace the benefits of new medical technology, and want to be offered products we are interested in at a low cost in a safe environment, we must be wary of the approach taken to achieve those ends. There is always a better way, and without scrutinising vague promises and assurances of technology-driven utopia, we may inadvertently compromise what we wish to protect. ●

SNAPSHOT Surveillance In Australia

The Australian government is putting millions of dollars into funding 'biometric passports', which will possess microchips containing electronic portraits of their owner's face. Whether the passport will help make the world more secure is questionable. However, minority (first) world citizens who possess the high-tech documentation will be privileged at airports, while those from majority (third) world countries — who already have trouble traveling because of their citizenship — will be further discriminated against.

Law-makers are considering how to deal with mobile phones with built-in cameras. The latest devices let you take a digital photo or short video clip and email it to anyone. Images from locker rooms, courts and even prison cells have appeared on the internet. How the legal system will regulate the way mobile cam-phones are used remains to be seen.

A recent research report, titled **Open Street CCTV in Australia**, questions the impact that 'electronic eyes' have had on crime and safety. In Britain, studies have found that surveillance cameras haven't been successful in reducing crime; often crime is merely displaced to other areas. The report calls for further investigation into the real value of surveillance systems before more cameras are set up.

RYAN HIGGITT is working with the Surveillance Project at Queen's to Concordia University in Montreal, Quebec, where he is continuing his research into humanity's connection with the technological.

JEFFREY SHELL lives a double life. By day he develops computer interfaces that recognise and respond to human visual attention at the Human Media Lab, and by night he looks at social ordering and risk management through the Surveillance Project.

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RISKY BUSINESS

Getting to the bottom of the public liability crisis is like trying to find out who threw the first punch in a schoolyard brawl.

SOPHIE BLACK enters the fray.

In Betty's town the annual spring garden show was an event not to be missed. Until Betty came along. Browsing through the gardenia section, Betty tripped on a pot plant and hurt her knee. Betty put a Band-Aid on, and called her lawyer. Betty contended that the garden show was negligent for not making the pot plant safer, the garden show argued that Betty was a klutz. Betty got a payout and the spring garden show was forced to close down.

The effects of scenarios like this are being felt by communities across Australia. Insurance companies will tell you that Betty and her lawyer are the reason the words 'public liability crisis' keep popping up everywhere. Betty's lawyer begs to differ. In the middle of all the arguing your local street fair has been cancelled and the footy club membership just got pricier.

Trying to get to the bottom of the public liability crisis is like trying to work out who threw the first punch in a schoolyard brawl. Accusations of 'they started it' are hissed by the legal profession at the insurance industry and vice versa, while state governments push through legislative reforms to restrict people's rights to sue for damages but still profit from the stamp duty charges that contribute to the high cost of insurance premiums.

In the meantime, organisers of markets, sport clubs, public events and spaces must learn to play the insurance game or risk shutting down. Gone are the days of throwing together a shindig in the town hall by tacking a few signs up and putting out the chocolate crackles. Organisers can't afford to operate as anything less than highly professional businesses, complete with comprehensive risk-management plans and paid-up premiums.

Food-stall holders fear the kid who could stick his hand on a hotplate and footy clubs dread the spectator who's hit in the face by a ball. They are paying prices and playing by rules that at times can be almost farcical – but they're managing to stay afloat.

'In a lot of our rural communities football is the lifeblood and the main focus of the town', says Glenn Scott, general manager of the Victorian Country Football League (VCFL). 'If we didn't work hard to come up with solutions... in many of our country areas those clubs would not exist and those towns would be in total sadness.'

It was a sense of social responsibility that gave the VCFL the foresight to implement a risk-management plan four years ago, while other organisations are only now beginning to introduce similar programs. The VCFL gives out a pre-match checklist to each one of the 880 clubs and 85 leagues it's responsible for across the state. The checklist of around 10 items includes commonsense advice on avoiding accidents such as regulating goalpost padding and spelling out exactly how to go about stacking chairs in clubrooms.

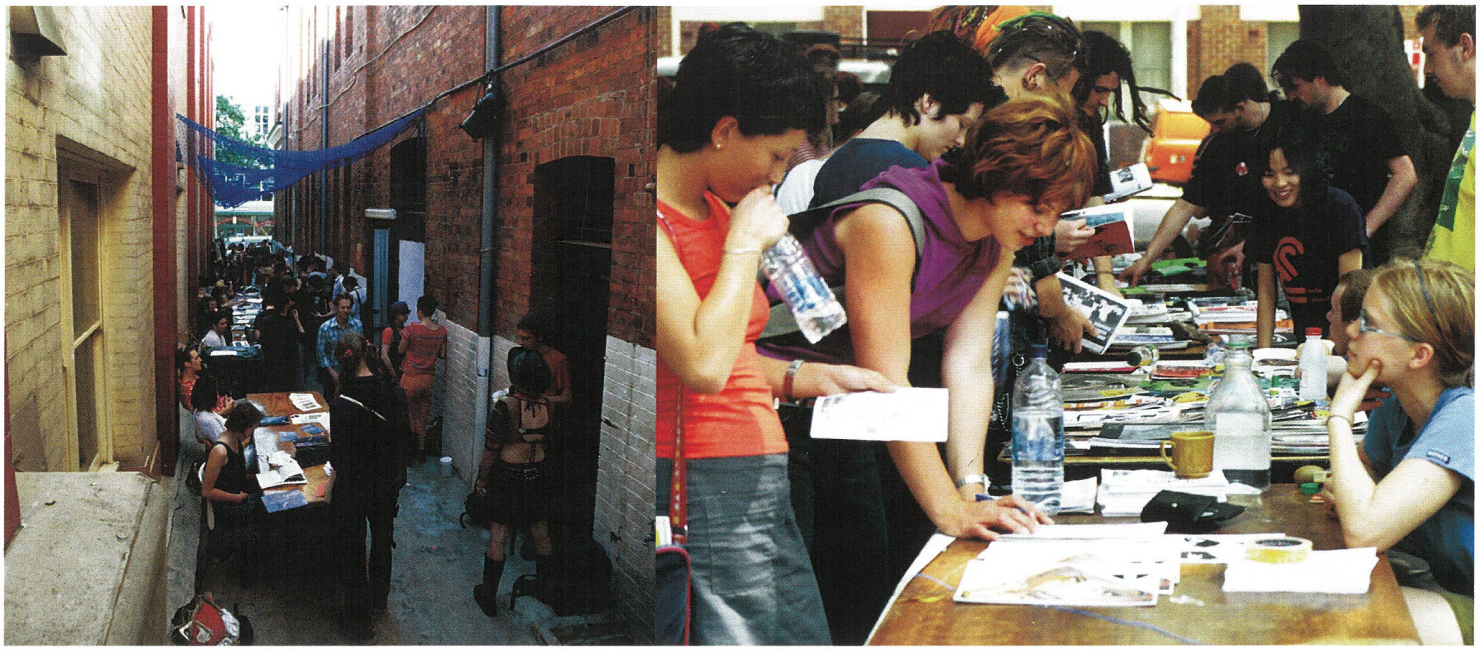
Two million people come through the gates every year. Yet the VCFL boasts an average of only four to five claims annually. The combination of its risk-management program, good claims history and Worksafe Victoria as sponsor, as well as the league's pre-match checklist, meant the VCFL this year paid an insurance premium only 20 per cent higher than they did the previous year. Peanuts compared to the other sporting associations now ringing them for advice.

'The main thing is planning ahead... because it's too late to deal with it once it blows up. We know that if something got out of hand across that many clubs and leagues, it would be like a bushfire out of control', says Glenn.

In New South Wales, whose 'litigious nature' was named by insurance underwriters QBE International Insurance London as second only to the United States, 27 events were cancelled as a result of public liability insurance issues in 2001. These days, it seems, life's a whole lot riskier.

On a misty Saturday morning in May, the Emu Plains Market in Balnarring, Victoria, opened for the last time. The 13-year-old craft market, famous for its setting in among the tall stringybarks of the Balnarring Race Course, closed for a number of reasons. The proverbial last straw was a lawsuit filed by a woman who broke her ankle in a pothole.

'The insurance company asked us what we were doing about the potholes — but it would be absolutely impossible to fix them all', says Cathy Thompson, co-founder of Craft Markets Victoria, which organises five markets around Victoria. 'We made the decision to close the market. The stringybarks are coming to the end of their life, and the drought was making it worse. In a way it will be a relief to go so we don't



Images courtesy of *TINA*

BRAVING THE GREAT OUTDOORS: INCREASED INSURANCE COSTS HAVE FORCED FESTIVALS SUCH AS *THIS IS NOT ART* IN NEWCASTLE TO CUT SOME OUTDOOR EVENTS FROM THEIR PROGRAMS.

have to worry about a tree falling on someone...'

The red tape and fear of litigation is a long way from what Cathy and her friend Carol imagined when they decided to found the famous Red Hill Market 26 years ago. 'We never even thought about this stuff when we started. Years ago at Red Hill someone got their pants stuck on a barb wire fence that they were climbing over so we just had to pay for a new pair of pants. These days people seem to want to blame someone.'

Australian Prudential Regulation Authority figures show that the number of claims lodged with public liability insurers has increased from 55 000 in 1998 to 88 000 in 2000 — a 60 per cent increase.

Despite the closure and the rising premiums, Cathy is positive about the future of Craft Markets Victoria. 'The plus for all this is that everyone is trying to make their environment the safest place it could possibly be.'

Those in the legal profession are reluctant to take the blame for the public liability crisis. The Australian Plaintiff Lawyers Association points to the collapse of HIH, and the fact that since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 the global reinsurance market — the market where insurers lay off their risk with other insurers — has suffered losses in excess of $20 billion. Reinsurance costs have skyrocketed around the world, resulting in insurance premiums rising at a rapid rate.

The Women's Circus in Melbourne, was at a distinct disadvantage when applying for insurance. The word 'circus' made sure the insurance companies ran screaming. To brokers, it doesn't get much riskier than acrobatics and fire twirling.

'Risk is something that we encourage in our organisation... we're encouraging people to push the boundaries of themselves and their experience', says Emma Heughan, general manager of The Women's Circus. 'People these days forget that risk is not necessarily a bad thing.'

Trying to tell that to insurance brokers proved difficult. 'They didn't have time to fight for us, because they were flooded with other people who were suddenly under review. We were too hard', says Emma.

The Women's Circus, formed in 1991, is internationally renowned for its performances and classes. Survivors of sexual abuse were the first to be invited, and today women of all backgrounds and abilities are taught skills such as acrobatics, stilt walking and juggling —activities that insurance companies view as 'high risk'.

When The Women's Circus finally obtained insurance, it was told its premiums would increase sizeably to eat a large chunk from the group's arts funding. But by that stage, those in the organisation were grateful that someone — anyone — was willing to insure them.

Insurance companies defend their reluctance by maintaining that public liability insurance has been a loss-making business in Australia since 1993. Consumers have been enjoying unnaturally low prices until now. Although the industry collected $880 million in public liability premiums in 2000, it paid out $1.18 billion in claims. To make a profit, insurers have either withdrawn from this line of business or increased premiums to reflect claims costs.

Marcus Westbury is a former Manager of the Australia Council's *LOUD* and *noise* festivals and one of the founders of the Newcastle-based *This Is Not Art* festival. Many outdoor events at *This Is Not Art* have been cut from the program because of increased insurance costs, insurance premiums having tripled.

Newly appointed as artistic director of the biannual *Next Wave* festival in Melbourne, Marcus cut his teeth organising low budget events that ran under the steam of enthusiastic volunteers. Marcus knows that if the public liability costs had been as high when he first started out as they are today, he could never have afforded to put on those invaluable events.

'There's a perception from people suing that it's free money when it's coming from the organisers of that event and the organisers of all sorts of similar events or projects or shops that are paying into that pool', says Marcus. *This Is Not Art* has never had a claim made against it, but risk-management and hunting for insurance is a time-consuming and expensive process, especially for an event run by volunteers.

Keeping the blow-out in insurance costs from killing community life is the challenge ahead for local organisers, insurers, the legal profession and governments. So is combating the attitude of people like Betty, whose litigious reactions are part of a growing culture of blame that contradicts community spirit.

'I think we have to make a clear distinction between an organisation that is really negligent... and the idea of bad luck that comes along with just getting lots of people together', says Marcus. 'There is a degree of risk just in being alive.' ●

SOPHIE BLACK is a freelance writer who has written for publications such as *The Guardian*, *The Independent* and *The Big Issue*, and has edited the annual literary journal *Verandah*.

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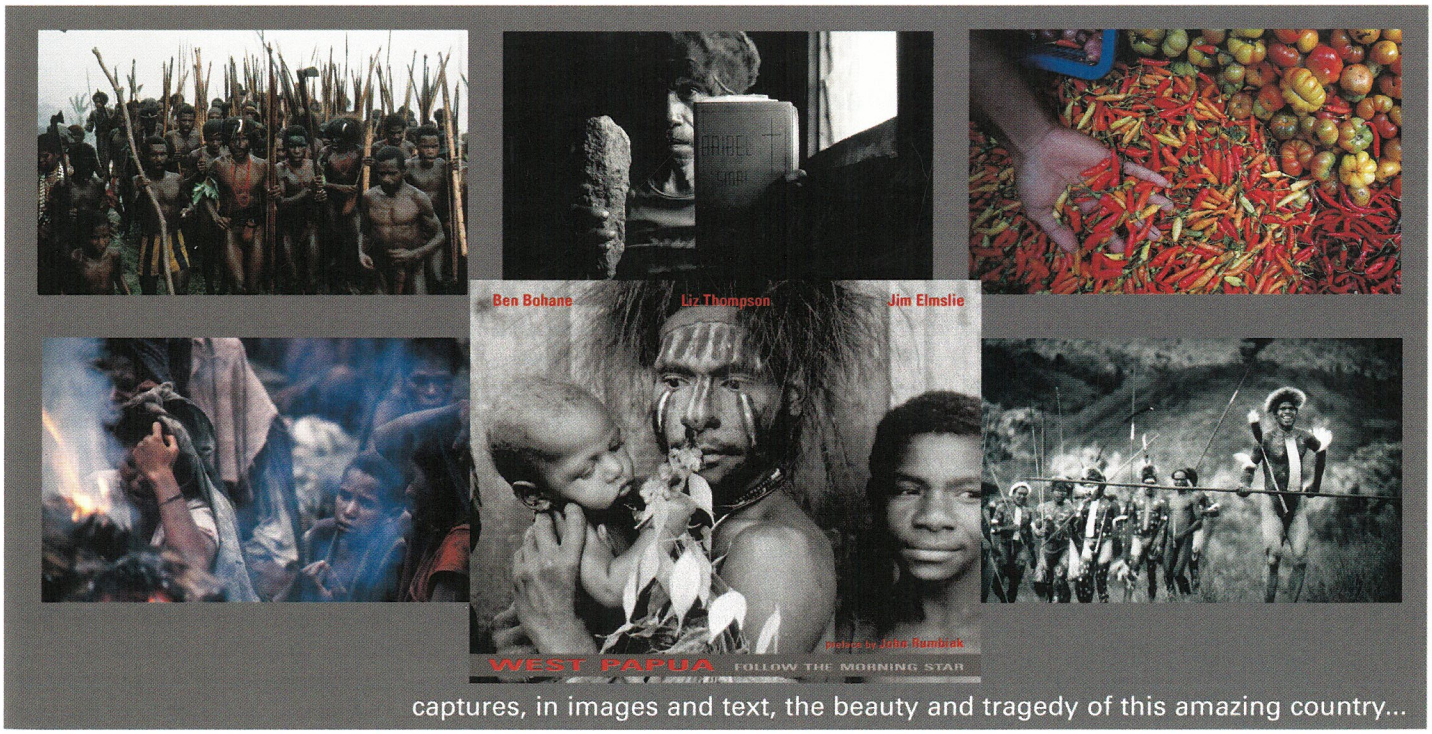

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EAST TIMOR ON FILM

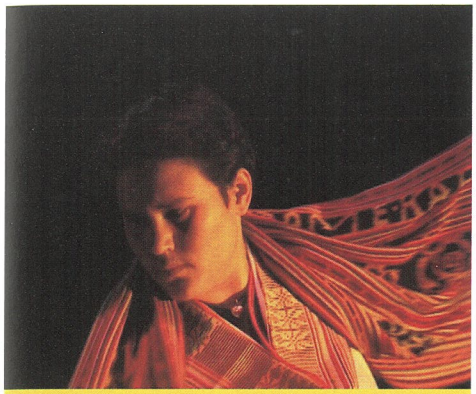
GEORGIE ARNOTT spoke to three documentary-makers about the ethics of filmmaking and the Australian government's 'triumphalist' attitude toward East Timor.

Australian peacekeepers continue to be hailed by government and media as the saviours of East Timor for their intervention there in late 1999. Yet how many Australians are aware that our government has more recently been actively negotiating the new country out of a fair share in gas and oil profits from the Timor Gap?

Australia's political relationship with East Timor, one of our closest and poorest neighbours, has been historically complex. However, from the handful of Australians who tirelessly lobbied for human rights throughout a 24-year occupation, to the many who wanted to help any way they could when the country was virtually decimated in 1999; over the past 28 years, thousands of Australian people have formed close relationships with the East Timorese land and its people. Throughout that process, many of us have also learnt a great deal about the political complexities of 'aid'.

Jenny Hughes, Carmela Baranowska and Marsha Emerman are three Australian women who have each explored their relationships with East Timor through film. Jenny is the director and producer of *Circle of Stones*, a documentary based in the East Timorese district of Suai, and producer of the website *Crimson Threads*. Carmela directed and produced the feature-length *Scenes from an Occupation* and is currently in production with *Welcome to Independence*, while Marsha's documentary *Children of the Crocodile* explores cultural identity and survival through the stories of two East Timorese Australian women.

ABOVE: A STILL FROM MARSHA EMERMAN'S *CHILDREN OF THE CROCODILE*



Cidalia Piref performs traditional East Timorese dance in Marsha Emerman's *Children of the Crocodile*.

Still from Jenny Hughes's *Circle of Stones*, based in the coastal town of Suai.

August 2001: Fretilin election campaign: Climbing the Foho Lulik (Sacred Mountain) in Covalima district (near Suai).
Still from Carmela Baranowska's feature length documentary in production *Welcome to Independence*.

MARSHA EMERMAN

For me, filmmaking is a form of personal expression and also a vehicle for raising awareness of such issues as human rights, peace and social justice. With *Children of the Crocodile* my purpose was to convey the experience of Timorese living in the diaspora, and in particular those in Melbourne's Timorese community. I chose two young women who were born in East Timor but grew up in Australia in families active in the Timorese struggle. Although they didn't suffer in the same way as those inside Timor, they still had to grapple with the difficulties of displacement, exile and negotiating dual identities.

I think the film conveys their experience in a way that helps other Australians to understand. I hope it also makes audiences think about such issues as our current treatment of refugees and Australia's relationship to the region.

An ethical challenge that I always face in filmmaking is balancing my power as director with the rights of the people in the film. I think it's very important for a film's 'subjects' to have some say in how they're represented. They need to be consulted and if possible brought in to the edit room to view and comment on the film before its completion.

The Australian government wants to appear heroic in East Timor, but their real agenda is to control the oil. One way for us to oppose this is to make films in which Timorese people can tell their own stories and express their own aspirations.

JENNY HUGHES

I was politicised through my personal life; through marriage actually, and feminism and through communication studies, so I come at my film from a political place. I've started with documentaries, but I'm getting more and more interested in fiction and construction.

I'm making texts that are essentially about relationships between people in Australia and in East Timor. By focusing on friendships, broader issues emerge. It's an exploration of culture and the ways in which we communicate with people from other cultures.

The intimacy that I'm looking for in the East Timorese will, I hope, come about through the process of collaboration. *Crimson Threads* is based on my friendships with a writer, an artist and a weaver. The plan is to give my computer to these artists and let them experiment. I see myself as facilitating their stories and getting them onto the web. It's experimental; it's about challenging the boundaries of language and culture.

I think television is incredibly masculine; it's climactic in nature and character. I'm as interested in process as I am in climax. I would have liked to have had the confidence to linger in *Circle of Stones*. *Crimson Threads*, however, is more grounded in my identity. Developing a website allows me to work more organically: my work is woven around necessary 'domestic work'. I always wanted to do something where my thinking would cross over with what's going on in my personal life. I can't deny the fact that I've spent the last thirty years being a mother and a grandmother and that this changes my work practices dramatically. **http://www.crimsonthreads.org**

CARMELA BARANOWSKA

While *Welcome to Independence* follows one family, it's about a lot more than one family. It's about more than Timor even. It's about husbands and wives, parents and children and it's about neighbours. Individuals have complexities, which are challenging; I'll start off with someone you presume to be a male chauvinist, but then can't help warming to. And that's life; that's reality

The big issue for me is: how do you represent reality? While there's been a move to make feature films more like documentaries, I want to make documentaries that are more like feature films so that people can sit down for an hour and a half and be transported to a particular experience. I want to make people think and to make people laugh, not only the audience but the people I'm filming as well.

For me, what works when I'm in East Timor is to be extremely connected to the people. I've always liked films where the filmmaker is living with the people they're filming.

The pressure points for change had been activated over 24 years in East Timor and Australia. That's the narrative that we very rarely hear. What we hear is this triumphalist garbage from people like Howard. But if people don't document these stories, they are — as amazing as it seems — forgotten. ●

GEORGIE ARNOTT worked in East Timor on an East Timorese Student Solidarity Council project during 2000. She is currently teaching and writing her masters thesis.

MUSIC, THE MASSES, THEIR COMPUTERS AND THE COPYRIGHT COPS

The recent arrests of three students charged with internet piracy have made people think twice before downloading music for free — or is that just what the music industry want us to think? BEN BIRCHALL wonders just how dangerous life is on the digital high seas.

In April this year three university students in Sydney were the first people ever to be criminally charged with internet piracy when it was alleged they were behind a website that offered illegal music downloads for free. They're facing five years in jail or fines of up to $60 500. Federal police claim that since its establishment, the website the students are alleged to have operated — MP3 WMA Land — had cost the Australian music industry $60 million.

It seems simple enough: the law is cracking down on illegal activity, which costs Australian industry millions of dollars. But dig a little deeper and the issue of internet piracy proves divisive, political and full of juicy conspiracy theories.

In January this year the Australian Record Industry Association (ARIA) released a report detailing an 8.9 per cent decline in profits during 2002. The report blamed the decline on worldwide economic downturn, competition from mobile phones, console games, DVDs and — you guessed it — CD Piracy.

According to Michael Speck, the head of the Music Industry Piracy Investigations (MIPI), two out of every five CDs are counterfeit. In Australia, piracy runs at about nine per cent of the market — and that's only half the projected cost. 'You quite simply cannot compete with someone who's giving your product away', says Speck.

The main threat comes from what are known as 'peer-to-peer' websites. The now defunct Napster was a peer-to-peer site. It was targeted by the RIAA (the US version of ARIA), with help from a massive civil suit brought by metal superstars Metallica. But Napster has merely been replaced by a myriad of other sites like Gnutella, Grokster and the ultra-successful KaZaA. Peer-to-peer sites look at everyone's online library like it's one big library. When you download a file it could be across the street or it could be in Iceland. It can take as little as a minute to download a song — and for free.

According to self-proclaimed net anarchist, Lachlan Simpson, it is virtually impossible to get caught downloading music. 'It would be very hard... especially on the small scale that individual consumers would be doing it. Peer-to-peer systems are at an advantage... it's almost impossible to legislate and prosecute against.'

But Speck disagrees. At any time his team are conducting between 20 and 30 investigations, and it was MIPI that was behind the arrests of the three students in Sydney. 'The internet is totally capable of control. All internet activity is driven by algorithms... by mathematical equations or codes. So to say it's beyond anyone's control is a sham', he says. 'By prosecuting significant infringers... [the music industry] is gradually stripping back that mythology.'

Lachlan Simpson contends that the arrests in Sydney are just about scare-mongering. 'If the government and the people with vested interests can create enough of a scare campaign, then... people self-censor before they even get to the computer.' But according to some theories, the arrests in Sydney served yet another function.

John Simpson, writing in the *Weekend Australian Financial Review* pointed out that the arrests came at a convenient time for the Australian government, in the middle of Free Trade Agreement negotiations with the US. In April the Office of the US Trade Representative accused Australia of having a lax attitude to copyright infringement. Being seen to be tough on copyright infringement was a good move on Australia's part.

But whether it impresses the US or not, or is part of an orchestrated scare campaign or not, Lachlan Simpson explains that the arrests won't change much. 'You're talking on two levels, you get... mainstream media, record company execs and lawyers and government officials talking on one level. [Then] there's still the underground of kids on the net who aren't actually paying attention to what the law says. They're still going to do it.'

The music industry is now trying to stop piracy before music makes it to the net. But the copy-protection technology that is supposed to render CDs impossible to load onto a hard drive — and therefore the internet — doesn't seem to work. Websites list methods to crack anti-copy technology that are as simple as drawing a line with a felt-tipped pen. Perhaps just as bad is the fact that CDs with such copy-protection measures don't play in many CD players. Melbourne punk veterans Bodyjar are signed to EMI and their last single came out with copy-control technology. 'Fucking hell' was singer Cam Bains's response to the alleged shortcomings of the anti-copy technology. 'We weren't consulted about it', he says of the measures. 'But it's their prerogative to put it out on whatever format they want.'

'Copy-protection technology is the first line of defence for copyright owners in the digital age', agrees Speck. He is optimistic about the future for the music industry. 'I think the long term effects of piracy in this marketplace will be that the legitimate businesses will develop technological models to protect themselves.'

But Lachlan Simpson is not convinced. 'Record companies are slowly on their way out. We're at such a crux in technology at the moment. You look at 15 years from now and it's hard to tell what kind of technology we'll have and how fast it's going to advance.' ●

BEN BIRCHALL is a musician and freelance writer.

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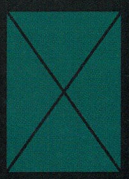

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NERD ANGST

Why aren't nerds considered cool? Because no one ever died trying to drag-race their laptop from cold boot to login shell at an intersection. ROUSER explains.

I'm happy to have the difference I make to the world be computer nerding. TCP/IP stacks fire my loins, they really do. I'm sure some of you feel the same, if you look deep into your trousers. I am conversant in obscure file-transfer protocols and how to get through all-night debugging sessions without smoking, and I'm delighted to get to use that knowledge for the Greater Good of Humanity.

But, fuck it, when did being a computer nerd become such an anti-social operation?

Most technology nerd-dom is not innately anti-social. A simple example of sociable nerds are the attendees of the Summer Nats. Are you familiar with the phenomenon? I will explain.

Once a year, several thousand rev-heads from around Australia make a pilgrimage to Canberra — and in particular to the automotive suburb of Braddon — to compare the machines they have spent hours bringing to the pinnacle of performance.

All along the street they gather around their works of virtuosic mechanical engineering (by which I mean 'cars'), hoods up and engines exposed. And they do it socially, checking each other's work out, occasionally bursting into spontaneous frivolous circlework. Sure, sometimes someone dies hideously in wreckage of twisted metal, or someone pegs an empty bourbon and cola can at my head as I cycle by, but it's all about social contact.

This year, the Summer Nats coincided with a meeting of the Canberra Linux Users Group, which is everything to computer nerds that the Summer Nats are to revheads. Ah yes, eerily similar. The benches of the meeting room were lined with nerds, their computer cases open, bonnets up, admiring each other's skill in eking extra megaflops from their hotted-up babies.

Except the room was hard to find, the voices were lowered, and after two slices of pizza and some TCP/IP sex jokes, we all headed home at 11pm. And the hoons threw cans at our heads.

It's crazy what gets social approval in our society. Tech nerds have much richer social lives if they are into really heavy, fossil fuel-burning technology than if they are into delicate boxes that flash and bleep.

The problem is that computers aren't life-threatening enough. No one ever died trying to drag-race their laptop from cold boot to login shell at an intersection. Hey, technical knowledge does not automatically make you an interesting person, whether you are into cars, computers, or nanobots. But some forms of technology at least provide you with interesting stories to tell to hide your fundamental lack of personality.

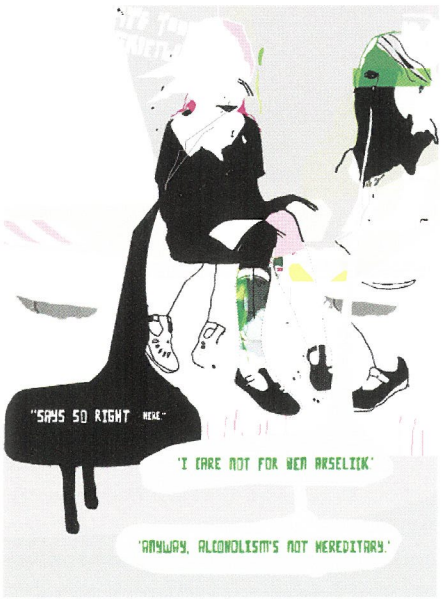
'It's an Australian obsession with physical bravery over intellectual achievement', a nice young physicist at the Canberra Linux Users Group meeting told me. No, it's not. It's about the fact that computers aren't dirty enough. I want them full of grease and inflammable fuels. I want the cops to pull you over if you try to operate a computer while you're drunk. I want an Easter Holiday computer death toll. I want to end up marooned on the Burmese border because my computer broke down. And more to the point, I want my tales of nerdy derring-do to be worth recounting to people who aren't nerds. Failing that, I would like a brain fertile enough to fabricate interesting stories about how exciting it is to be a nerd, so that no-one suspects I spent my weekend at a desk with clean fingernails and a modem.

ROUSER is a swanky young sys-admin and sound designer from Canberra who enjoys mulled wine, differential mathematics and bushfire ecology. rouser@webone.com.au

REVIEW National Security www.nationalsecurity.ag.gov.au

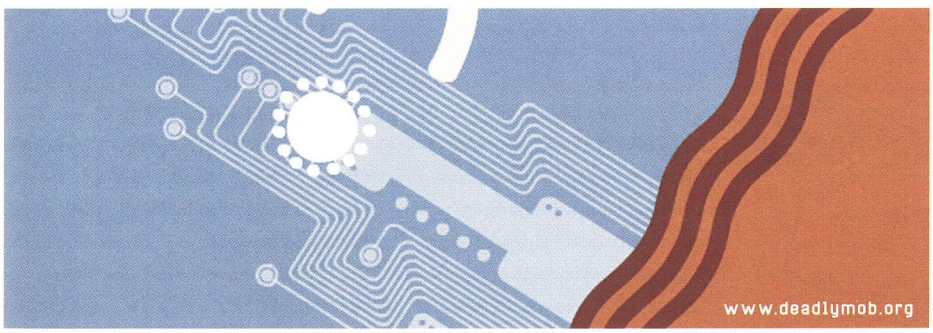
After September 11, 2001, everything changed. I became captivated by replays of planes hurtling into New York's World Trade Centre. You could say, without the benefit of a thesaurus, that I became alarmed, afraid, aroused, anxious, apprehensive — alliterative even — but not alert. But now, thanks to the 'single access point for national security information from the Australian Government', I know that I should 'avoid exposure to excessive television replays of events'. And I also know that I shouldn't have opened that package. I should have left it where it was, isolated the kitchen and prevented others from entering, called the police, made a list of everyone who was in the kitchen so the authorities could question them later, and quivered in a safe place (not the kitchen) until emergency services arrived and gave me further instructions. But I just had to have that fridge magnet.¶ *National Security* is a neat website, scoring high on readability, navigability and the-government-is-your-friend-ability, and proving that after the dotcom crash there is indeed a bright future for web geeks in the ever-expanding security and surveillance industries. ¶ And there's lots of free stuff you can get on the site, like kits on what to do if a bomb explodes ('get out of the building'). There's even an online game for the kids: 'Let's Look Out For Australia', though I admit to finding this game a little more difficult than I thought I would — even with the clues about sporting events and sunny beaches. ¶ A word of warning: this fine site should not be confused with http://www.nationalsecurity.org. The latter is hosted by a right-wing US outfit called the Heritage Foundation that promotes things such as blacklisting critics of US government policy and the privatisation of Medicare. There is simply no likeness between Heritage's propaganda site and our government's very own security site, which has a different url. A MITROPOULOS

REVIEW Cornerfold www.sbs.com.au/cornerfold



An ambitious experiment hosted on the SBS website, *Cornerfold* set out to draw on the massive and diverse zine community in Australia and bring the tone and lo-fi aesthetic of zines to the online environment. Released roughly every five weeks, each differently-themed edition of *Cornerfold* 'magazine' features stories from zinesters and writers from around the country. ¶ While I consider myself to be pretty net-savvy and spend a lot of time online, I've got to say I generally prefer my art, zines and comics tactile; and not in a grey plastic button and mouse kinda way! Before I even really had a good look at *Cornerfold*, I was dubious about its ability to take the joy of reading a good zine, rant or confessional gut-spill and put it online — with pixels replacing the typewritten and the cut and pasted — while still managing to inspire and engage. ¶ However, haunting and high-energy soundtracks combine with clever and diverse Flash works to animate the short stories on *Cornerfold* in a way that — surprisingly — I really enjoyed. ¶ When I was at uni and my lecturers were wetting their pants over James Joyce and hypertext fiction I couldn't stop yawning, I thought this hyperfiction deal was a load of po-mo crap! But the bite-sized, zine-style works on *Cornerfold* somehow stay true to the offline works that inspired them, and manage to add another dimension with the addition of motion and sound. ¶ An impressive and ever-growing archive of varied and engaging works — check it out! ALEX KELLY

OUTBACK ONLINE



While better-off families in metropolitan and suburban Australia tinker on their home PCs, fiddle with a Mac at school or share pirated software, young Aboriginal people in central Australia often do not have a home PC or internet cafe, let alone reliable phone or satellite connections.

Aboriginal people in remote communities, however, show an enormous interest in the web and computer technology.

Although communities and community life is not generally well represented online, two strong exceptions are the Warlpiri Media (http://www.warlpiri.com.au) and PY Media (http://www.waru.org) websites, which contain an array of multimedia content that shows a little of life in the centre and its characters. There are also some fantastic Aboriginal new-media artists represented online at http://www.fineartforum.org/Gallery/cybertribe/blackout/

Why do so few sites successfully engage the remote audience? At present a number of barriers are slowing the use and appreciation of computer-mediated communication. Most sites are text-based and present obvious obstacles for those with poor literacy skills. Even the use of Aboriginal language text such as Luritja, Warlpiri, Pintubi, Arrente or Pitjantjatjara has little effect. Many kids can speak but not read their language. One Aboriginal media and youth organisation making good headway in this area, however, is dEadly mOb (http://www.deadlymob.org), based at the Gap Youth Centre in Alice Springs.
JAY GIBSON

BLOGS, BLOGS, BLOGS

Blogging. It started as web-logging — a convenient way to record your daily trawl through web esoterica and current affairs for others to see. Now all manner of news outlets, embarrassing online diaries and gossip channels are using 'blogs' of sorts to keep their sites freshly updated.

Just another buzzword?

Well yeah, of course it is. Web-critters do love to add new bookmarks to their vocab. But give blogs a chance? For starters, 'blog' sticks a little better than 'frequently updated personal commentary'. The word has also become the glue for a whole treasure of sharply written, informative, often hilarious websites by different authors. Exploring only a few of the blogs below will quickly show you just how interwoven their links can be, and the extent to which people are banding together around the concept of the 'blog'.

Do it yourself

Probably the best thing about a blog is that it facilitates very easy online publishing and continual updating. A thriving collection of online software allows you to create and maintain your own website merely by visiting a particular webpage, typing in your new entry and sending it off. Voila. Your website now has a new commentary for all to read. www.blogger.com is one of the more prominent offerings, although for a thorough listing of blogging tools, u needs to be chekkin: http://www.lights.com/weblogs/tools
And for blognews: http://blogdex.media.mit.edu

Cream of da blogs?

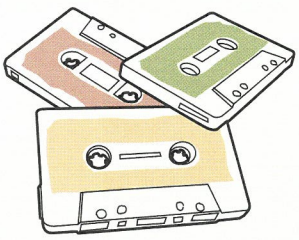
Like beer, taste in a blog is a personal thing. Some, though, have gained wider recognition within the blogger community, and even flirted with earning their authors an income. Cult bloggers include Metafilter, milkandcookies, Memepool, fuckedcompany.com and Boingboing.net. But while their relentless delivery of weird to profound bounty impresses the socks off me, my barefeet do prefer to be tickled by some of the more offbeat blogs you can find in the side caverns linked by these or other blogs. Some good ticklers?
Reverse Cowgirl: http://blogs.salon.com/0001437
Grand Text Auto: http://grandtextauto.gatech.edu
Neural: http://neural.it/english
JEAN POOLE

MUSIC

REVIEW Sokuseki-Men Sosueus (Lo-Fi Killers)

Sokuseki-Men, (which, if Google serves me correctly, means 'pickled men') hail from Hobart and have just released their first album *Sosueus*: a mash of samples, rants, choppy tones and beats. I can't tell you too much about the artists, other than that they seem to be a pretty cheeky bunch and that they've assembled a random and engaging record. Industrial beats chop up a range of cuts, from old film quotes to Michael Jackson, Deee-Lite and Criss Cross samples. 'Leaaane' mixes Cyndi Lauper's sweet and innocent 'Girls Just Wanna Have Fun' with some crunchy beats and drunken slurs. Other tunes, such as 'Eye Talk', are more sombre, with what sounds like samples from some 60s sci-fi flick and more ethereal background tones. 'Go Aussie!' combines a racing guitar track, fast beats, a butchered Baby Elephant Waltz and some disturbed screaming. While many glitchy and sample-based works can be a bit grating to listen to after the initial amusement and curiosity wears off, Sokuseki-Men manage to make *Sosueus* an interesting, twisted, experimental and happily listen-able record. ALEX KELLY

SEEKING NEW SOUNDS



Sometimes I sit alone in Birrurung Marr, the new park on the banks of the Yarra River in Melbourne. The sparse hill behind me resembles a granny smith apple cut in half and placed in a still life. The skyscrapers behind it, statues of concrete and glass. As the Yarra flows, urbanity becomes a minute speck of reality; an Ai Yamamoto electro-metronome lullaby.

Melbourne has that effect on me. Its rhythmic consistency of transport flows and teapot conversations make me search out new sounds — minimal blips and mellow noise. My latest addiction is Rose Turtle Ertler, Electrik Ukulele Lady's *Ping Pong Princess*. I've never heard a ukulele manifest itself into so many experimentations. The sounds on 'het platteland', sung in Flemish, are like the slow released gurgling of breath underwater. 'I Desire Wingz (amongst other thingz)' is a fairytale told through effects pedals: 'claws instead of fingernails, paws instead of feet, long ears, not little ears, short hair for the heat, arms that stretch & twist around, neck that reaches hi, waterproofskin, wingz that flap and flyy...'

Moving from Newcastle to Melbourne has expanded my musical explorations, often into genres I hadn't anticipated. Maybe I've mellowed and realised that music doesn't necessarily have to be brutal. It can be kooky, funny and yet still resonant; the kind of music that leaves me pondering as I ride my bike home through quiet laneways with frosted fingertips.

Occasionally I still find myself searching for darker, more bestial beats in eerie locations, similar to Newcastle's massive windmill or industrial woodchip pile. I get nostalgic for black beer and two dollar Bloody Fist gigs at the 'Hunna'. Seeing Mark N play in Melbourne recently temporarily satisfied my longing for extreme aural attacks and lip-reading in dark corners. Having Ashley Baker's *Sounds of Reluctant Malevolence* vocal regurgitation CD on hand also aids reminiscence for bedroom-created noise and pushing the limits of spoken word.

On the banks of the Maribyrnong River, Melbourne reflected back at me, I've found an industrial landscape that reminds me of home. Here I periodically get along to the Articulating Space series in the bowels of Footscray Community Arts Centre. It's an appreciation of intuitive screeches and cut-ups so hypnotic that I sit in mesmerised silence, Anthony Pateras's piano virtuosity forcing my eyes closed.

Like the mixture of instruments and performance styles at Articulating Space, my life is eclectic. A cut-up, a series of pasted layers of styles and sounds. Wherever I am, it's fun to search them out. LOU SMITH

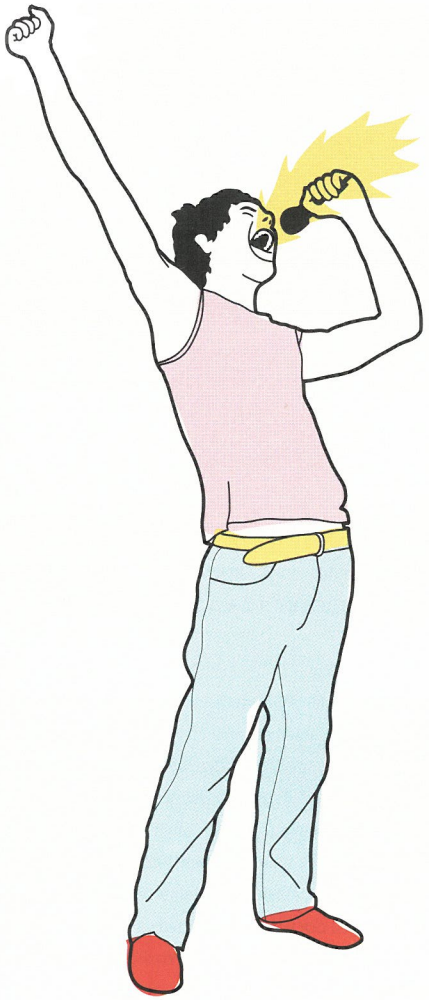
Anthony Pateras and Ai Yamomoto
Synaesthesia http://www.synrecords.com

Rose Turtle Ertler
Scootstar Records http://www.scootstar.org

Ashley Baker
2KK Records http://www.geocities.com/palsyfacial/cover

Bloody Fist
http://www.bloodyfist.com.au

LOU SMITH produces and presents the *DIY Arts Show* on 3CR Community Radio in Melbourne, which focuses on independent and experimental art forms and music. She has been involved in organising cultural and community events and used to play in Newcastle band *The Beef Curtins*.



KARAOKE GENEALOGIES

When I was a tone-deaf fourteen-year-old, my apparently masochistic parents bought me a copy of *You Be The Rockstar* for my birthday. With re-recorded classics like 'Epic', 'Dr Feelgood' and 'Love in an Elevator' on one side and instrumental versions on the other, you were supposed to learn the lyrics from side A then bust out your own versions over side B. After spending days locked in my bedroom practicing 'Blaze of Glory', I felt ready to perform for my cousin and her friend. I belted out an impassioned rendition of the Bon Jovi hit, complete with cowboy choreography and a climactic drop to my knees, eyes shut and hands clutched to my chest. I knew it was the beginning of an incredible singing career. Then I opened my eyes and, seeing the embarrassed amusement of my audience, put the tape away forever.

My (re-)introduction to karaoke came last year, when I finally found a crowd who understood that stage presence counted for a lot more than staying in key, whatever that is. Even though my mate had secretly signed me up for Bros's 'I Owe You Nothing' and I had no idea how the verses were supposed to go, I understood that an air of confidence and a well-shaken booty would get me over the line. I wiggled my hips enough that, when I was finished, a middle-aged woman with super-dense make-up pulled me out of my seat to slow dance. As I shot my friends terrified 'Help me!' expressions, they of course laughed and started a poll on whether she'd try to pash me. When I extricated myself from her clutches and got back to my seat, she turned to the woman beside me and said, 'He must really love you.' We were both pretty amused, since we'd never met.

This is the key to karaoke: sex. The raunchier the performance, the better. Anyone who can't pick up in a karaoke bar just isn't trying. What better opportunity are you going to get to show off your moves on stage for a room full of drunk strangers? You'd *better* work it. Otherwise you'll just be another annoying tool doling out an uninspiring favourite with your arms pinned to your sides and your feet glued to the floor. It might be note perfect, but it's still putting me to sleep. Like B2K say: 'I wanna see your sexy body go bump bump bump.'

So bump, baby. And although it's easier to sex up something like 'Bootylicious', 'The Thong Song' or 'Hot In Herre', you can slut out to any song. Just last weekend I did a shimmying, pelvis-thrusting version of the Beach Boys' 'Barbara Ann' and believe me, I could have gone home with anybody in the room.

SHANE McGRATH

SHANE McGRATH lives in Marrickville. He's currently working on a doctorate on Pop Music and Mandatory Detention and teaching himself the Harlem Shake.

REVIEW Blur Think Tank (EMI)

It's impossible to start any review of *Think Tank* without mentioning that guitarist Graham Coxon walked out before recording. Or that Fatboy Slim is one of the producers. Or without mentioning singer Damon Albarn's recent side projects, Gorillaz and Mali Music. So now that we've got that out of the way, let's get to work.

Think Tank is not an easy record. It's not a rock record, either. It is, however, a Blur record. Yes, you can hear echoes of Albarn's extracurricular activities, but the classic songwriting, laddish attitude and his distinctive vocals keep it real. And really, Fatboy Slim only produces two songs. And Coxon? His absence is filled with beats, keyboards and Albarn's guitar; looped, untidy and utterly charming. ¶ Some highlights? The first single 'Out of Time' is a killer. A classic pop song, that raises the hair on the back of yer neck. Second single 'Crazy Beat' is a 'Song 2' for 2003. It catches Blur as a snarling three-piece with Fatboy Slim pushing the faders. Or the aptly-titled 'Sweet Song', a gentle, lilting ballad. Or the punk-rock shock of 'We've got a File on You', with its gang vocals and middle-eastern break. Of course. ¶ *Think Tank* is a creative leap with enough pop sensibility not to alienate fans. BEN BIRCHALL

REVIEW Arab Strap Monday at the Hug & Pint (Chemikal Underground/Spunk)

Aidan Moffat and Malcolm Middleton — aka Arab Strap — tend to offend a lot of people. They have that unique knack for making you feel uncomfortable. Emerging from Glasgow with the likes of Mogwai and The Reindeer Section in the early 90s, the sombre Scottish duo have made their name through poetic dealings with drunken jealousy, self-doubt and that ever-ambiguous line between love and sex. ¶ After two years of touring and working on solo projects, the band have released their fifth studio album, *Monday at the Hug & Pint*. As the title suggests, this is familiar Arab Strap territory. ¶ But while they've neglected to stray from their usual thematic grounding, the release differs somewhat stylistically. Almost gone are the stark guitar and drum machine combinations heard throughout *Philophobia* and *Elephant Shoe;* replaced by a more folk-influenced, fuller sense of instrumentation. While layers of strings and keys may punctuate former dead space, the release still possesses the minimalist charm of earlier recordings. There's still Moffat's slurred, half-spoken vocals, there's still Middleton's finger-picking guitar, and there's still — if only on occasions — antique drum machine beats. ¶ Context is pretty important with Arab Strap. They walk a fine line — ugliness, sexism and bitterness, or honesty, gritty sentiment and self-parody — perhaps a bit of everything. DAN RULE

FILM

FEARLESS TRADITIONS: AUSTRALIAN DOCUMENTARY CULTURE AT THE CROSSROADS

Most people love a good documentary. So what are the obstacles to getting docos made, screened and regarded as part of a strong Australian cultural tradition? MEGAN SPENCER and JOHN HUGHES debate.

Megan Spencer is the film critic for the national Triple J radio network, an independent documentary maker and has spoken and written about, programmed and taught documentary across Australia. John Hughes trained as a news cameraman with the ABC before turning to the world of independent filmmaking, and was commissioning editor of documentary with SBS Independent from 1998-2001. Both are currently engaged in their own documentary projects. They speak here with RACHEL MAHER.

As an advocate of independent film, and also a filmmaker in your own right, what is your take on the documentary film industry in Australia?

Megan: I don't see myself as part of a documentary industry in Australia, I see myself as part of a documentary culture, which is global. The tradition that I belong to is one that has been around for the last century and pertains to Australia and to every country that has produced a documentary film.

It's interesting, with this explosion of digital technology and domestic video cameras becoming part of everyday life, you would think that the infrastructures inside broadcasters and film funding bodies [in Australia] would adjust to embrace that. But I think that the way [the industry] is set up in Australia means that there's a lot that goes by the wayside. We've seen an active kicking-out against those people who dare to go off independently and make a film.

What would you like to see made and screened in Australia, as part of a global documentary culture, that you don't see?

Megan: I want to see serious films made about any subject. Making a film should be about nothing but a meritocracy. It should be about an idea, its relevance to our culture, giving a voice to the voiceless — *whoever they are* — showing us something about ourselves. And I'd like to see pop culture properly embraced, because I think that's a serious way of looking at ourselves.

I think there is a severe underestimating of the audience by commissioning editors within funding bodies and broadcasters. In my experience, many of the 'gatekeepers' I've met have often been film illiterate or exclusive (as opposed to inclusive) about film in general, and their life experiences are often somewhat limited. So when someone goes to them with an idea, something that's out of their range, it's — and I have actually heard this from a commissioning editor — 'How does this relate to me as a guy who lives on the north shore of Sydney?' That's why we've got a real dearth of diversity and scope in documentaries made here.

John: Essentially I agree, there are a lot of people who are making interesting work — and initiating it themselves — who can't find expression through the current structure. It's a question of resources. The amount of money available to support documentary filmmaking and culture is very limited. The industry is actually built on the dedicated voluntary work of the committed artists and filmmakers themselves, except for a relatively limited commercial sector. But Megan, do you think that the possibilities are in *changing* the broadcasters, or in building distribution and exchange?

Megan: It's *both*. The mindset in which we think about documentary film production [in Australia] is not progressive, it's stuck in a series of systemic paradigms...

Documentary has also got a really bad name and I put that down to distributors often being lazy or ignorant or having this pall of 'documentaries don't make money'. In this day and age, I think that's an anathema really. There is no reason why we shouldn't be able to get documentary releases into our cinemas. I mean, if you can market *Big Brother*, you can market anything.

So if filmmakers are approaching broadcasters wanting an audience for their films, the broadcasters are in fact setting the agenda — how do they determine what is screened for Australian documentary audiences?

John: It's an interesting paradox. There are a lot of people making work that they want to get on television who start by asking 'What do the broadcasters want?' Whereas the broadcasters are saying 'What we'd really like is something we've never seen before.' [These days] the broadcasters are taking much more power and actively commissioning what they think their audiences want. From their perspective, what they are trying to do is find ways of maximising audience. That is one of the factors [feeding] the current state of emergency. The broadcasters are not essentially there to develop film culture.

Megan: But that is how they project themselves. You hear all the people at the broadcasters talking about 'nurturing' documentary culture and how they are responsible for so much of it. Whether on paper it's their agenda [or not] to create documentary culture, they are.

Is this the same conversation that was going on in the 1970s when people were trying to make independent films?

Megan: *(Semi-sarcastic/semi-wistful intonation.)*

POPCORN TAXI

The popularity of Popcorn Taxi is on the rise now that the advent of digital technology has meant that anyone can be a filmmaker! It's a regular event in Sydney and Melbourne that brings together people who are interested in film to watch movies and have a discussion. Popcorn Taxi began its life in Sydney. It was established in late 1999 by independent filmmakers Gary Doust and Matt Wheeldon. Today Gary has left to focus on filmmaking, leaving Matt to run Sydney events from the Valhalla Cinema. Michael Agar is Melbourne's coordinator — facilitating Popcorn Taxi at the Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI).

Popcorn Taxi creates a relaxed space where films are watched and a three-way discussion takes place between the audience, a moderator and invited guests. The events are for filmmakers but are also accessible to those who just love watching films. Michael Agar describes them as a combination of 'professional development and entertainment'. The focus isn't on gossip and technicalities or new releases and hits. 'We try to have as little bullshit as possible', says Michael. 'I hope people walk out a touch more inspired than they walked in.'

For now, Melbourne and Sydney host the events, although an expansion to Brisbane is in the pipeline. The best way to find out what's going on is by email. Register your address at the Popcorn Taxi website:
http://www.popcorntaxi.com.au
SAM de SILVA

The 1970s, the beautiful period! Tell us about the beautiful period, when there were talented people getting money to make films!

John: People were making work independently, they were borrowing equipment and screening work in cooperative environments and setting up community screenings in factories and workplaces and schools and trying to work out how to get the ABC to open up to independent work — which was resisted on the grounds that it wasn't 'professional'. [This] organised effort to open up the ABC just happened to coincide with neo-liberal [moves] to reduce its monopoly and to outsource some of its production. So gradually more and more work started to be commissioned from independent filmmakers. But I can't think of a period when this wasn't a problem.

Megan: It's never been easy. But I think there was a bigger sense of community or a bigger sense of possibility [then], because it wasn't so focused on television. Film movements from all over the world were still influencing people.

There are still screenings in galleries and warehouses; what needs to happen to foster a strong documentary audience in Australia?

John: There is an enormous amount of energy out there of people making work, finding that television is not the convivial environment for it; that pubs and art galleries are. And that is fantastic. [However] instead of trying to work out ways of organising together, people [have] become more and more isolated because they see themselves as competitors, rather than part of a culture that wants to negotiate with the mainstream decision-making institutions. One possibility would be to develop a forum where that energy can organise, politically and nationally, to effect change in mainstream institutions.

How can that be done? You almost need a radio program with a youth audience to build something like that...

Megan: I am [already] doing the job that every commissioning editor and every project manager in this country should be doing: I get out and I see films. I use my job to represent as many different films and voices as I can.

I think we just need people who are obsessed with film and obsessed with nurturing a vibrant, progressive, mutating film culture that takes us forward to evolve.

Well what are the strengths in the Australian documentary tradition? What do we have to build that vibrant progressive film culture on?

Megan: People with video cameras. And people who understand, who have talent. Not everyone with a video camera is going to be a great filmmaker, but a lot of them could potentially be! And there is a quintessential Australian spirit, which is fearlessness, I think we could build on that. Not just political films, but not being afraid to go there and find out about someone's life if it's foreign to your own. That fearlessness needs to go right across the board [to] people who are in positions of power, making decisions about what affects our film culture.

John: Look I think the work that Australians do in documentary is fantastic but there is a tendency for us to undervalue the work that we do. I can't help but to finish with what the problem is! I think it's timely to find ways of organising, to create systematic ways of addressing that, and bringing Australian documentary culture into a place where audiences recognise it for the fantastic tradition that it is.

RACHEL MAHER is a media activist, community radio producer and has been involved in a range of radio and video documentaries. She recently completed post-graduate studies in documentary film and television. Her films include *Young & Free* (4mins) an essay about the use of the word unAustralian, *A State of Peace* (20 mins), which looks at the life of an Iraqi Australian woman in the build up to war, and *MISSTAR* (2 mins) about the gender transition of a drag performer.

FILM ON SCREEN

SYDNEY INDIGENOUS FILM FESTIVAL
10 — 12 July
Parramatta Riverside Theatres
http://www.parracity.nsw.gov.au
02 8839 3311

BRISBANE INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL
29 July — 10 August
Brisbane
http://www.biff.com.au
07 3007 3003

DARWIN FILM SOCIETY PRESENTS CINEMA CLASSICS
Monthly June — November
Deckchair Cinema and NT Museum Theatre
http://www.deckchaircinema.com.au
08 8981 0700

WILD SPACES FILM FESTIVAL
All around Australia
August 2003
http://wildspaces.wild.net.au

AUSFEST AUSTRALIAN DIGITAL AND VIDEO FILM FESTIVAL
1 — 4 November 2003
Brisbane
http://www.ausfest.com
07 3886 9988

KALEIDESCOPE SHORT VIDEO+FILM+MULTIMEDIA FESTIVAL
10 — 14 November
Paddington Town Hall Sydney
http://www.metroscreen.com.au
02 9361 5318

BOOKS

NOW

At the time The Master and Margarita was written, Russian authors were expected to write boring shite about peasants yanking beetroot from the glorious Earth whilst singing the praises of Stalin. If they didn't write what the authorities wanted to read, they wound up sewing bread into their mattresses at the Hotel Gulag or didn't get published. Death or silence were up for grabs.

Mikhail Bulgakov, an ultra-individualist, was prolific and popular until the Soviet authorities clamped down on his work, which expressed a belief in God and suspicion of the State. The literature board, stacked with Socialist Realism junkies, set about shredding him. They called him 'one of the nouveau bourgeois breed' and accused him of 'spraying vitriolic but impotent spittle over the working class and its communist ideals'. (They didn't like him.) One particularly nasty little munter, the pro-communist writer Anatoli Lunacharsky organised an anti-Bulgakov campaign in the 1920s. In the end no one would publish him. After 1927 no more of his work appeared during his lifetime. *The Master and Margarita* was suppressed until a censored version of it came out in 1966.

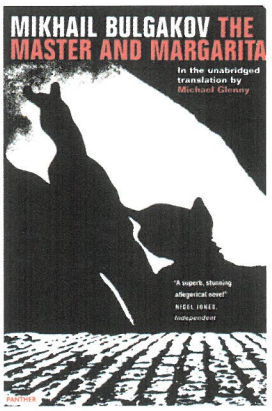
Fittingly, the book is a satire of censorship. Set in twentieth-century Moscow, the main character 'Master' is a novelist who has been persecuted by the (fictitious) literary establishment, MASSOLIT.

MASSOLIT are a collective of die-hard fuck-wits with limited writing ability, who refuse to publish the Master's novel about Pontius Pilate on the grounds that it is 'redundant'; and declare that rejected authors like the Master 'would curse heaven for having failed to endow him at birth with literary talent, without which, of course, no one could so much as dream of acquiring a MASSOLIT membership card.'

We first meet the Master in a mental hospital after he has burned the only copy of his rejected novel.

The Master and Margarita operates on different layers. The Master's (burnt) novel forms a historical layer. Set in Jerusalem, this layer retells the story of Pontius Pilate, the Roman official assumed to be responsible for the execution of Christ. I have never made it through the Bible, but Bulgakov's retelling made its events real for me. 'It was growing darker. The cloud now filled half the sky as it surged toward Jerusalem; smaller white clouds fled before the black monster charged with fire and water. There was a flash and a thunderclap directly over the hill. The executioner took the sponge from the lance.' And it would have taken moxie to write that, given that Stalin thought HE was God.

Another layer is a supernatural one. The Master is in a mental ward and is separated from his lover, Margarita, until the Devil (also known as 'Woland') arrives in Moscow dragging a fantastical plot with him. This is where the characters assume a surreal and absurd form. Woland arrives with Koroviev, a tall man with a broken pince nez. Also with him are Azazello, a man in a bowler hat with one protruding fang; Hella, a raunchy naked redhead; and a giant black cat that smokes cigars, makes sarcastic comments and packs a gun.


MIKHAIL BULGAKOV THE MASTER AND MARGARITA
In the unabridged translation by Michael Glenny
"A superb, stunning allegorical novel"
NIGEL JONES
Independent

ABOVE: The Book
LEFT: The Dude

Time and space are ambiguous in the presence of Woland, who is in search of an escort for the annual Satan's Ball. The search leads to Margarita, who agrees to host the ball if the devil reunites her with the Master. In the meantime, the Devil rips holes in Moscow society.

When they meet the Master tells the Devil that he can't show him his novel because he burned it: 'I'm sorry I don't believe you', says Woland. 'You can't have done. Manuscripts don't burn.' And he proves it by producing a copy of the book.

The point that I sucked out of the novel was this: great literature endures political repression; writers have a responsibility to push on through censorship. Bulgakov was supposed to write a novel that idealised Lenin — instead he coughed up an apocryphal satire featuring a talking cat. As a journalist, I am supposed to write for the mass media about the terrorist threat posed by Afghani refugees (or some such bullshit) — instead I am going to write what I know to be so. In Australia, without the threat of the Hotel Gulag, we have a responsibility to make the most of the opportunities still afforded to us to get our point across — because the way things are going, they may not last. Anti-terrorist legislation, the Office of Film and Literature Classification and the Ministry of Education could mean that 'freedom of speech' will be a vague memory, unless we get our words out now. Start by reading this book. Finish by writing your own. CATFORD COLES

Mikhail Bulgakov wrote *The Master and Margarita* under an oppressive Soviet regime. CATFORD COLES wrote this review under Howardism.

MAGABALA BOOKS

In September 1984, a traditional song and dance festival was held at Ngumpan near Fitzroy Crossing in Western Australia. The festival was attended by more than two hundred people from Kimberley communities. They voted for the formal establishment of the Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre, a centre set up to assist in the development of the arts industry, ensure that profits went to artists and their communities and provide copyright and publication protection to traditional storytellers. The centre went on to establish Magabala Books — one of the most successful Aboriginal publishing houses in the country.

Magabala Books, named after the bush banana that spreads its seeds across the Kimberley, provides advice and publishing services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people nation-wide and publishes manuscripts from throughout Australia. 'It's not just about publishing books', says Jacqui Wright, spokeswoman for Magabala. 'We're also providing Indigenous groups with information about copyright issues, providing employment and training and raising national awareness about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture.'

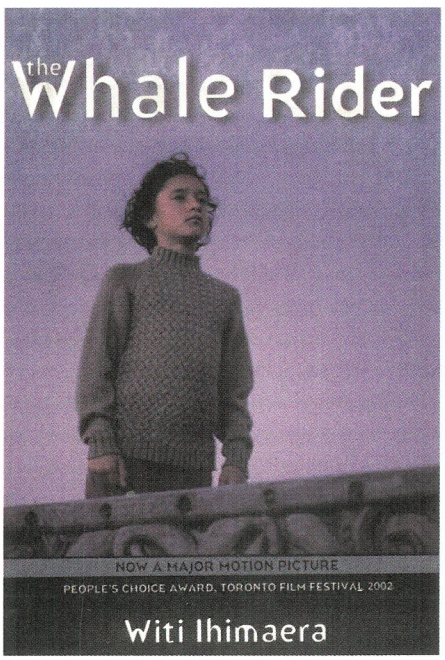
The independent publishing house publishes genres as diverse as social history, fiction, autobiography, poetry, musicals and traditional and contemporary children's stories. Magabala Books offers an alternative to the larger, mainstream publishing houses that are almost impossible for unrepresented new writers to gain access to. 'These days a lot of publishing houses don't even accept unsolicited manuscripts', says Jacqui. 'So first of all you have to get yourself an agent — but to get yourself an agent you have to be published. A lot of Indigenous people don't have access to, and don't even want to work in that system.'

Magabala Books faces the challenge of operating within the parameters of the publishing industry while also catering to the unorthodox needs of writers who sometimes bear important social responsibility in the telling of their stories. Jacqui cites *Out of the Desert: Stories from the Walmajarri Exodus*, nominated for the 2002 WA Premiers Awards, as an example. 'That book includes 17 storytellers and began as a project in 1964. The editors have to explain to people what's going to happen to those stories, who's going to read them and work out the royalty payments. These issues have to be addressed at bush meetings', says Jacqui. 'You have to talk to not just individuals but groups. Often stories contain cultural information that pertain to a whole group, not just one person, and not everyone may want it to go out.'

Magabala Books have just employed a travelling editor to head out to remote communities and be able to liase with writers face to face. 'The process of putting a book out can really bring people together. Often these projects are collaborative, with Indigenous writers working with non-Indigenous people', says Jacqui. 'It's very valuable and not just about the end product.' SOPHIE BLACK

REVIEW Witi Ihimaera The Whale Rider (REED)

Witi Ihimaera is perhaps the best-known Maori writer in New Zealand, but it took the conversion of his book *The Whale Rider* into an internationally successful movie to take his fame further afield. *The Whale Rider* is the story of a tribe of east-coast Maori people whose first ancestor, Kahu (also known as Pai), came from the land of origin, Hawaiki, on the back of a whale. Since then, every generation has been led by the eldest son of the whale rider's descendants — until now, when there is no son, only a daughter who is also named Kahu. ¶ Kahu's struggle is to prove to her disappointed grandfather, Koro, that being a girl is not the barrier to being a leader that he thinks it is. She doesn't struggle alone, however. Her uncle Rawiri, who narrates this story, is bound (by Koro's wife, the feisty Nanny Flowers) to look after his niece following her birth. Then, of course, there are the whales. For this is not only Kahu's story, but also the story of the koroua, the whale that brought the first Kahu to Aoteroa (New Zealand). The vivid first-person narrative of Rawiri and his family is intercut with the koroua's story, the whale's friendship with the first whale rider and his longing to see his old friend again. These two stories come together when Kahu and the koroua meet, and Kahu's destiny as the leader of her people becomes clear to all. ¶ Director of the film version, Niki Caro, has commented that she was drawn to *The Whale Rider* because it is a story of a young girl's spiritual coming-of-age that doesn't involve a sexual awakening — a very rare thing in the movie world. This story is also remarkable for the way it shows that 'tradition' is not a stable, fossilised thing — it can change without losing its integrity. Ihimaera is very critical of the patriarchy inherent in Maori tradition. The traditionalist males, Koro and the koroua, are both coerced out of their pig-headed ways by tough female partners. Power is understood in this story as simultaneously destined and earned, and it does not merely reside with the male head of the tribe — even though he may think it does! ¶ This blending of change and tradition is reflected at the level of language. *The Whale Rider* is written in English, yet many of the descriptive terms and nouns, not to mention some great epithets, are in Maori (a glossary is provided at the back). The rhythms of the Maori language give the book a particular and wonderful tone — old language is used to tell a new story. ¶ In her film, Caro dramatises Kahu's story and draws us into the young girl's world. The book, however, is broader, slower, not as intimate with Kahu, perhaps, but more aware of the whales and their spiritual connection with the people of the whale rider. SABDHA CHARLTON.



TOURING THE COMFORT ZONE

We take off for the unknown, with our trusty travel guides listing the easiest and most highly recommended ways to go about spontaneity. But how much do we really see? MATTHIA DEMPSEY reflects.

In London, on the kind of wintery night where the determination of the elements to keep you inside is almost palpable, a friend took me to see Paul Kelly play. At the battered but lovable venue, reserved almost entirely for Australian acts visiting the UK, we looked down from the dress circle and heard the flattened no-nonsense vowels of Australian conversation float up to us with the beer fumes.

Unfortunately, when Kelly stepped on stage, the conversation didn't stop. Too much beer, too many familiar faces suddenly thrown together at this unofficial Australian embassy, too much to catch up on. They wouldn't shut up. Kelly's voice, croaky with a cold, strained out over the chatter, but eventually one song caught their attention.

'We argued on the channel train to Paris' he sang. And ears pricked up. Lone whistles pierced the auditorium and the crowd offered a burst of clapping. 'We split up for a while in Madrid... Now I'm in a bar in Copenhagen', Kelly continued, and at the mention of each stopover on the lonely planet-sponsored tour of Australian duty, the cheer went up. The crowd articulated their agreement. They'd seen all these places too, they seemed to say. Had ticked them off the list. And, they all agreed: 'every fucking city's just the same'.

On Zakynthos, a former Venetian outpost on the Ionian Sea, my friends and I found ourselves walking through a nightmare. 'How can they call this travelling?' asked my friend as we ventured into the street outside our hotel in search of dinner. 'They' were the English tourists for whom our entire street and indeed the surrounding ten or so blocks of hotels, restaurants, bars, clubs, curry-houses and mini cricket pitches had been created. All was fluorescent light and English menus. Everywhere were the soccer-shirt or boob-tube-clad visitors, branded with the striped red and marble-white flesh of the novice tanner.

We were accosted by a middle-aged Greek man inviting us to try a dinner special of beef vindaloo with a pint of lager, and I soon ended up in my usual smiling and nodding role as the only person in the conversation not speaking Greek, while my second-generation Greek-Australian friends launched into conversation. I understood enough to appreciate that my friends' conversation centred on our altogether depressing surroundings. The Greek spruiker rolled his eyes and waved his hands. Perhaps my friend asked again in Greek: 'how can they call this travelling?'

But as I nodded and smiled and looked around I felt words of defence spring to my lips. I looked at the raw red flesh of a couple who walked by hand in hand in search of some potato with gravy and a serve of mushy peas. They didn't have to look far. I remembered the relentless pressing grey of the past

six months of weather I had just endured in their home country. *Did* they call this travelling? I thought. Or did they just want some time off work, some familiar English accents, a spot of cricket, mushy peas, and something their home would never provide — the sun? The people on the island that night, I had no doubt, would never have left their home if it boasted the annual number of days of sunshine that Zakynthos could provide.

But with sunshine of our own, we Australians pride ourselves on travelling for very different reasons. We want to step outside the familiar comforts, and there we were, my companions now pressing their new friend for some 'local' knowledge. But what we really wanted to know, it seemed, was where the best, least-crowded beach was. How much more 'authentic' was our experience of Zakynthos really going to be? I wondered. This hideous fluoro and flashing tourist precinct and its milling inhabitants — was this actually a more honest collection of travellers than we were?

The truth is you can't step out of your comfort zone, no matter where you put yourself. Someone has to push you. I've been stranded on the Greek-Turkey border; spent the night sleeping on the bitumen outside a railway station in Thessonoliki; woken at dawn after ten hours asleep on the deck of a ferry to the sound of lightning, as a twister of saltwater edged its way in our direction. I've found myself completely alone, dragging my backpack down an Italian country road in the pitch black, after a three-day journey without a proper night's sleep — and have suddenly realised I no longer had my passport on me. Sure I was uncomfortable. But that's not quite what we're looking for.

We spend so much time looking for the new and challenging that the world begins to cater to it. In the mountains of the Thai-Burma border my fellow trekkers and I were asked by our guides to stop for a moment. The people in the village we were approaching were performing a special ceremony that could not be interrupted but which we could watch quietly from behind the trees. It is a measure of how farcical our search for the 'other' has become that in those days of war between Thailand and Burma, we were safe from the armies, which acknowledged the importance of our Australian dollars by avoiding our path through the hills. And that as this ceremony unfolded we glanced at each other, we travellers: wavering, and suspicious that this 'coincidental' performance had been arranged for our benefit.

We spend so much time searching for the crack through which we can enter these foreign worlds that we don't often stop to wonder why we should be let in.

Does it follow that because we have the money and inclination we should be able to collect the experiences of life in another culture, the way the English tourists of Zakynthos collected postcards of the Acropolis? In Asia or Africa or any of the other nations so much poorer than our own, we go looking for a challenge, for the taste of another life — but we'll take it without the hardships thanks. We'll take your food but leave your economy. To drop in on a country for a few days or a few weeks, remaining safe in the bubble of our own past and future elsewhere — should we expect any really 'authentic' experience to seep through this comfort zone?

Which isn't to say that the English tourists had it right with their mushy peas. In the streets of Greece I also observed my friends meeting long-lost relatives, was lucky enough to try their food, and listen to sometimes indecipherable conversations, and left with some inkling of day-to-day life in that country. That's the best we can do: leave our travel guides behind for a while and watch. Listen and observe and remember. Do our best to notice that every fucking city isn't the same — but never kid ourselves that we've seen the real thing. ●

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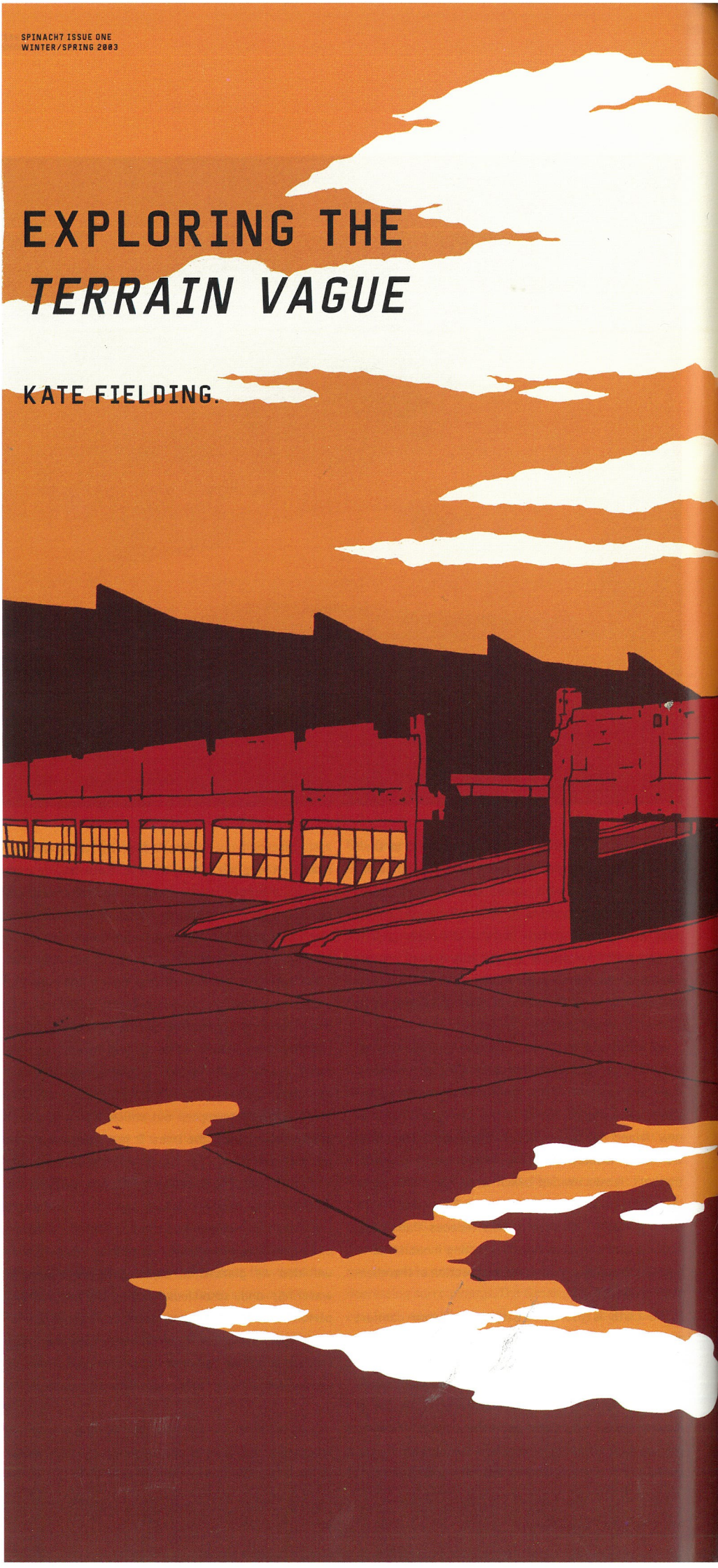
SPINACH7 ISSUE ONE
WINTER/SPRING 2003

EXPLORING THE *TERRAIN VAGUE*

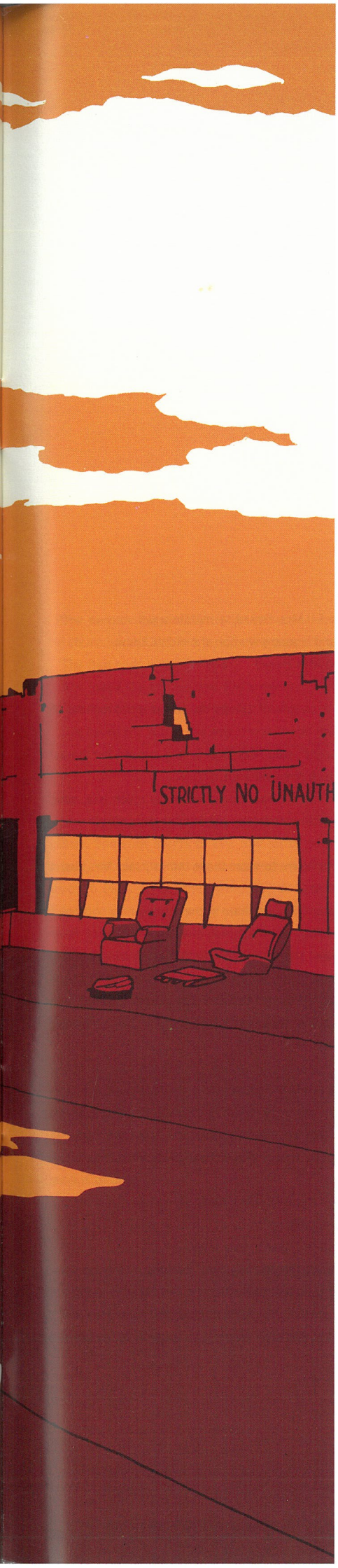
KATE FIELDING.

Between the jazz ballet and horse riding of adolescence, and the VB-fuelled debutante balls of young adulthood, lay a limbo land of entertainment. While city kids set neighbourhood letterboxes on fire, us country kids explored the dangers of three-wheeled motorbikes, and dreamt up adventure.



My friend and I would spend our weekends traipsing across the paddocks of western Victoria looking for the old bottles that lay buried beside abandoned farmhouses. We had long been fascinated with the broken-down house on her farm; we climbed across its topsy-turvy floor, picked flowers from its wild garden, camped beside it terrified of ghosts, and dragged home feral kittens. Looking for bottles gave these explorations new purpose and sent us further afield; we were teenage archeologists dragging through dirt for thick glass, opaque medical vials, anything old and strange. We became adept at picking out the clumps of garden shrubs that usually indicated an abandoned farmhouse. Cows would lick their nostrils at us as we pushed our way into those old buildings. Inside, sunlight cut diagonal bars through the gloom like celestial slippery-dips. Most of all I remember an incredible, silent breathlessness; the same imagination which extracted history from bottles would feverishly anticipate all sorts of dusty monsters.

More recently I have been adventuring through studies of abandoned or marginal spaces in the city. *Terrain vague* is an architectural term used



The urban *terrain vague* includes disused factories, alleyways, undeveloped parkland and that space beside train lines where graffiti, chip packets and prickly pear congregate.

to describe these kinds of places, whose purpose is ambiguous or undefined. Abandoned houses feature here too, but the urban *terrain vague* includes disused factories, alleyways, undeveloped 'parkland' and that space beside train lines where graffiti, chip packets and prickly pear congregate. Forgotten, waiting, off-limits, these sites mark the 'wildness' within an urban setting, which spasms with new construction and development. Such sites are wild not because they are 'untouched', but because they fall outside the definition of metropolis as productive, industrial and expanding. They are important for their potential — not in the property-development sense — but as available space for the possible dreams and activities of people who would never get (or necessarily want) the chance to own and develop space in a conventional way.

The 'empty', 'disused' space has an uncertain future; defined as useless or obsolete in its present form, it waits in limbo between re-development or heritage-listing. But its occupied present is often lively and magical — these spaces abandoned by development are by no means uninhabited. Most advocates of the *terrain vague*, academic and otherwise, point to the crucial function of these wild places as spaces for the imagination, for roaming, for exploration.

To me, what people *do* in these spaces is often as interesting as academics speculating about their potential. The internet offers many Australia-specific postings detailing exploration in obscure places. The Cave Clan is an obvious leader in this field, being dedicated to the enjoyment of underground drain systems as well as topside inquiries. Graffiti sites will often feature accounts of the adventure accompanying writing — often in unusual, marginal places. By no means are all *terrain vague* spaces legally off-limits. The dog-leg back alleys of the inner city are a hotbed of intricate stencils, dumped couches and drunken snogs, while suburban cemeteries are spacious and deliciously eerie. I would argue that 'refunctioning' a space — using it for an activity it clearly wasn't designed for — is also a form of creating wild spaces: the skateboarding crews who transform empty car-parks into zones for physical prowess and creative transport run their wheels all over the city planners' limited thinking. Sadly, I'm yet to find the website dedicated to savvy rural yoof who spend their weekends fossicking for bottles!

There can seem so few places in the city to wander freely — in both the financial and political meaning of the word. Even most 'cultural' spaces are spruiking for capital. Meanwhile four-wheel drive ads bleat from billboards that adventure is located far away, and requires a posh vehicle. But if you're prepared to get a bit of dirt on your pants and cut loose to your own courage, the fear and delight, pranks and practicalities of exploring wild city spaces await you. ●

Between watching her radishes grow, KATE FIELDING has just completed a collaborative graphic novel, which moonlights as her history honours thesis. She believes beetroot is the new black, and suggests that if you want more tales of the *terrain vague* you check out William Upski Wimsatt's *Bomb the Suburbs*, Nikos Papastergiadis's collection *Strange* and Hakim Bey's *Temporary Autonomous Zone*.

CLEAN, WHITE WORLD.

LISA LANG

The crickets and birds have sung through dusk and are quiet. A girl leans back against the bus stop pole as the bus draws near. Headlights and dust run up her sandals and bare legs. She picks up her bag. Faces look out at her through the long side windows. She sees them with a strange clarity, caught under light like museum pieces. She stumbles up the steps, glad she won't have to talk to anyone.

+

The idea of leaving came in fragments, perforated, like a line of ants.

+

When they closed the ice rink, thirty kids staged a protest, dumping fifty kilos of ice outside the mayor's office door. The ice rink was the main place to hang out, and she went there every afternoon. The girls mostly ate Twisties and watched the boys skate, occasionally skating out to fetch a scarf stolen by one of the boys wanting a chase. But she skated circles, long elegant circles in which she carved the ice into a geography of her own, mapping a clean, white world.

The ice was an impressive jewelled pyramid against the mayor's door. But it melted and they closed the rink anyway.

+

The bus is not full. She finds a seat halfway down, behind a woman with big hoop earrings and a child on her lap. The child is tugging at an earring and looks at her with enormous eyes and then back at the earring. Behind her a Japanese man sleeps with his head back and lips gently parted. The main lights go out and they are left with dim, overhead lights like private stars and the bus takes off. She sleeps.

+

She had finished school and was working at Tit for Tat, her mother's lingerie shop. Beige and white and pink bras were spread over the counter like a melting meringue. She had two customers — Mrs Beard, a middle aged woman with a double-D cup and back problems, and a young woman she didn't know.

'Your mother not in today?' asked Mrs Beard.

She shook her head.

The young woman asked to try a couple of things on and stepped behind the changing curtain.

'I need something with extra support', said Mrs Beard, who cupped her breasts when she said the word support, which she said a lot.

The young woman emerged from the change room wearing a black bra, which forced her breasts together like two sumo wrestlers made to share a single seat.

'What do you think?' she asked.

'Oh it's lovely, I wish I still had the figure to wear those things', said Mrs Beard, briefly touching her hands to her chest.

The young woman smiled and began to fix her hair in the mirror.

'I might hook me a little something, wearing this', she said, and Mrs Beard threw her head back and laughed, and they could see the fillings dotting her back molars.

The shop was a world of false intimacy and the girl hated it. She hated standing there with one woman cupping her breasts, and another half-undressed, and nothing to say to either of them.

+

She wakes to the howling of the child in front of her, just as the first sunlight breaks through the early morning fog. Seagulls appear and disappear back into the fog like ghost birds.

+

She saw her first foreign film on a Wednesday night at the film society. It was a Japanese film about an ex-cop who robs a bank so that he can take his dying wife on a holiday. They stay inside a mountain cocooned in snow, and then drive out to the winter-bleached sea. Everything white, each frame a picture carved in bone.

The ex-cop says very little, but he sets off fireworks to make his wife laugh, and he steals her a kite. And he kills the gangsters who have come to kill them.

The film ends with his death.

She loved the ex-cop, and she imagined her father might be something like him. Silent and kind, but tough when it counts.

She loved the world the way it was in the movie.

+

Around a bend and the sea is in view, sparkling wildly, a sea drawn by a child with glitter. Someone starts to cry. She looks around and everyone is staring straight ahead, except for the Japanese man. Tears run into his mouth and make see-through blots on his shirt front. He doesn't cover the tears or wipe them away. Everyone pretends they can't see it, like they are willing him not to exist. She hates them for it. They are like her mother pretending her father has never existed. She would like to go and sit next to the crying man and ask if he knows the film about the ex-cop. The crying continues for many kilometres and she is enthralled at the way the sound seeps into her and makes her sad too.

+

At the restaurant they had gone to for her eighteenth birthday she was entranced by the lacquered wood screen with the dragons on it and the precision of the food. Her aunt regarded the food as if she had been served up twigs by a three-year-old and was playing along for fun. She barely put a thing in her mouth, and made loud groans of approval.

'Mmm, it's just so unusual', said the aunt.

'Yes, we've been wanting to come here since it opened', said her mother.

Her uncle stared sadly ahead. Everyone knew he was going to court for not paying his debts, but no one said anything of it, they just left him to stare at the menu.

Her mother and the aunt talked about the town: who was making money, which marriages were rocky, whose children were out of control. It was amazing what you picked up in the lingerie business.

Her mother was sharp-eyed. But she hadn't noticed a few bills palmed from the till now and then.

When her aunt left the table for the bathroom, her mother turned to her and said through her smile, 'It wouldn't kill you to say something.'

+

They file out of the bus and stand waiting in a huddle for their luggage. The Japanese man stands several metres back. He does little knee bends, white puffs of air leaving his mouth like empty speech bubbles.

She jogs over to him.

'Excuse me.'

She stands there wishing she had something to say.

Then she reaches quickly into her bag.

'Could you take a photo of me please?'

The man glances around. Behind her lies the squat concrete bus station, ahead of her the highway, trucks flying by. She thinks he might refuse. Then he holds his hand out for the camera. He lines up the shot for a couple of seconds. They stand facing each other.

'Smile?' he says.

She lifts up the corners of her mouth and hears a gentle click.

He lowers the camera and grins.

The people waiting for their luggage are staring now, and she wants to yell out to them:

'He exists!'

She picks up her bag and heads for the station building. Sky and bus and people are mirrored in the automatic doors. They slide back, and she wonders if she's stepping into a clean white world. ●

LISA LANG is the author of many unpublished stories, and she has a really good idea for a novel.

WARNING: HEALTH ALERT

The World Health Organisation (WHO) today issued a new warning against non-essential travel to the entire Western Hemisphere following renewed concerns about the spread of Severe Loss of Perspective Syndrome (SLOPS). Officials are warning travelers not to visit the United Kingdom, the United States, almost all of Western Europe, and Canada, following further outbreaks of the disease, which has led to mass panic among the media, thousands of ecstatic children being kept out of school by their credulous and moronic parents, and increased profits for DIY stores as the idiot public rush to bulk-buy face masks and boiler suits.

A WHO spokesperson said: 'You'd be much better off going to somewhere like Thailand or China, because all you've got to worry about there is SARS, and let's face it, you're about as likely to die from that as you are to get kicked to death by a gang of zombie nuns.'

The SARS virus has now claimed a staggering 500 lives in only six months, which makes it considerably more deadly than, say, malaria, which only kills around 3000 people every single day. Malaria, however, mainly affects only darkies what speak foreign, whereas SARS has made at least one English person feel a bit iffy for a couple of days, and is therefore considered much more serious.

The spread of SLOPS has now reached pandemic proportions, with many high-level politicians seemingly affected by the disease. The rapid spread of SLOPS has been linked to the end of the war in Iraq and the need for Western leaders to give the public something to worry about — otherwise, they might start asking uncomfortable questions about domestic issues.

WHEN VICTIMS REFUSE TO BE VICTIMS

MARNI CORDELL

After one grey day stopped-over in Hong Kong airport, where one in three people were masked and CNN had just caught notice of an 'irrepressible' disease; I touched down in Melbourne on the eve of war.

Returning from the *Crisis/Media* conference in Delhi, during which media workers, activists and academics had discussed and debated the media's representation of — and obsession with — crises, it was strangely illustrative and ironic to watch two of this year's biggest media narratives unfurl over the following weeks.

'We have entered the era of crisis as a consumer item' said keynote speaker Arundhati Roy at *Crisis/Media*, 'If you don't have a crisis to call your own, you're not in the news, and if you're not in the news, you don't exist.' And as I watched my nightly quota of SARS and Allied Forces in the weeks after my return, I couldn't help but wonder about the small stories; the big stories from small places; and the big stories from big places that had been pushed off the playlist because a few Americans had died.

There are many factors that dictate whether or not an issue gets exposure in the mainstream media. Sometimes coverage depends merely on the amount of rich and/or white people that have been killed or injured; while at others it's much more organic — much more dependent on attention-deficit ebbs and flows.

The 'media trend' is every activist's worst enemy and best friend. Human rights groups lobby for years for their day in the sun. Greenies can save whole forests with the right weekend papers behind them. But if audiences are only introduced to an issue when a major crisis occurs, are they really capable of viewing that issue holistically? Does the occasional, fickle attention afforded by today's media to certain issues, do more harm than good?

'Crisis reportage flips history belly-up', proclaimed Roy. 'It tells stories back to front and makes us see history through the distorting prism of a crisis... it forces us to make hurried and forced choices; of Good vs Evil.'

'For many people in the world', she demonstrated, what the media calls '*peace* is [already in fact] war... and *war* is often the end of a flawed peace process.' Unfortunately, while 'starvation makes the news', she gibed, 'malnutrition doesn't quite cut it'.

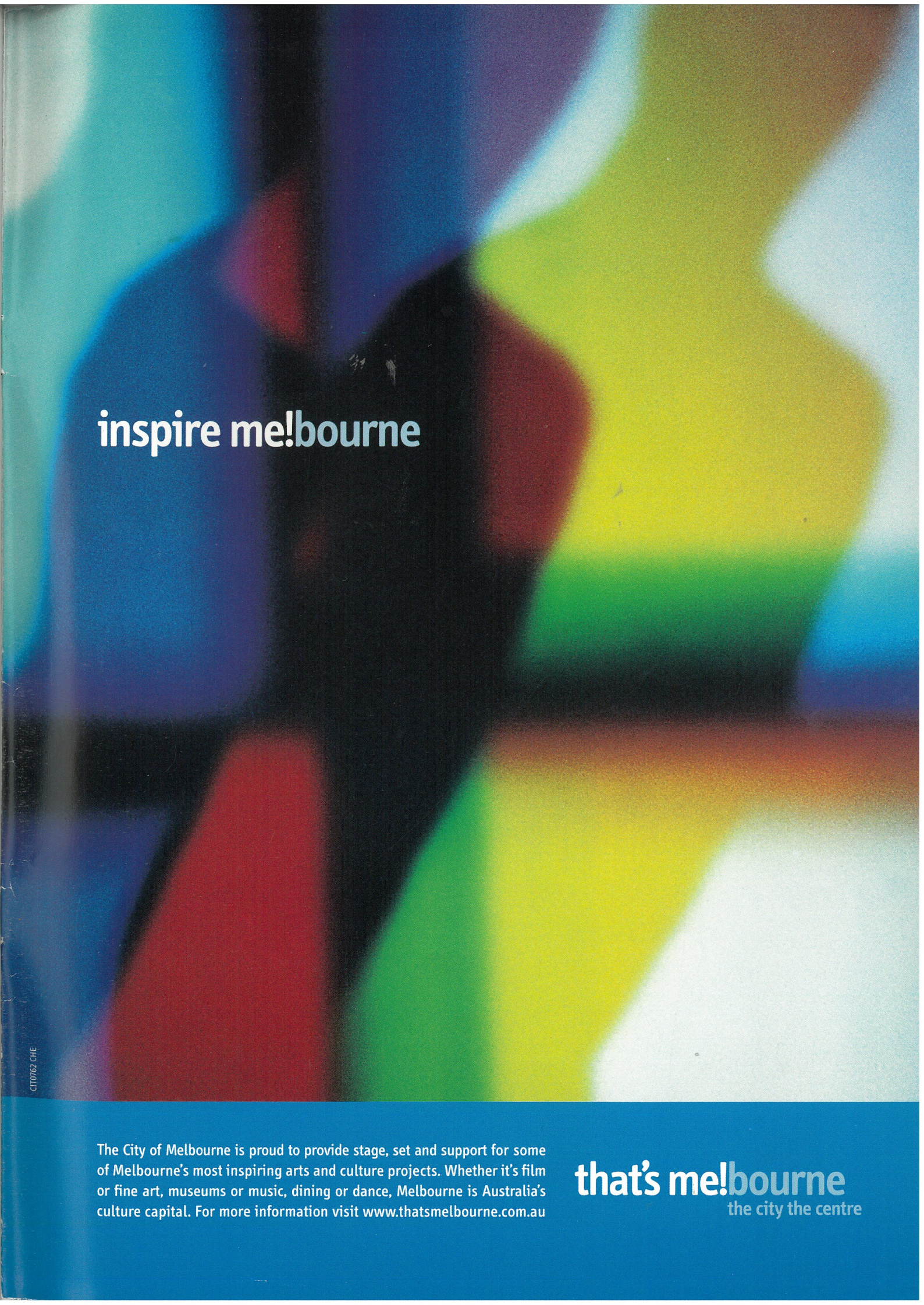
Our media appears to possess a truly under-developed sense of what catches audience attention. The tabloids have hit on a winner and stuck with it: they understand the human need for schlocky escapism, and cash in on it easily. But those media outlets attempting to provide us with a more comprehensive understanding of the world are failing daily. The complex subtleties of everyday life are routinely glossed over and pushed into stereotype. Whole cultures are simplified and categorised. Why aren't we, as audiences, trusted to unpack complex realities?

With reference to her work campaigning against the Narmada Dam, Roy continued: 'the media has painted the fight against big dams as a simple struggle between pro- and anti-development, when the real issue with dams is that privatisation of essential infrastructure is essentially, structurally undemocratic.' In this way, is it not true to say, asked Roy, that 'those against dams are demanding more modernity — more democracy — not less?'

But such a point of viewing the world is not only anti-profit; it's also difficult to explain in a five-minute news grab. When people step outside of predictable roles — when subsistent peasants rise up against giant multinationals — the media attempts to regain control by categorising them in a new way. 'When *victims* refuse to be victims', Roy declared, 'they become *terrorists*.'

Resistance movements, Roy believes, have been forced to create consumer-friendly crises too: 'We should not be feeding the media's desire for theatre.' How then, does one articulate resistance, without it becoming 'the fodder of crisis'? Writers, journalists, activists and media workers 'have to become peace correspondents; not war correspondents', she announced, 'we have to lose our terror of the mundane'. ●

Crisis/Media was organised by the Sarai Programme of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi, together with the Waag Society for Old and New Media, Amsterdam. http://www.sarai.net/events/crisis_media/crisis_media.htm
Marni's attendance of the conference was assisted by the Conference and Workshop Fund of the Australian Network for Art and Technology, a devolved grant program of the Australia Council, the Federal Government's Arts Funding and Advisory Body. http://www.anat.org.au



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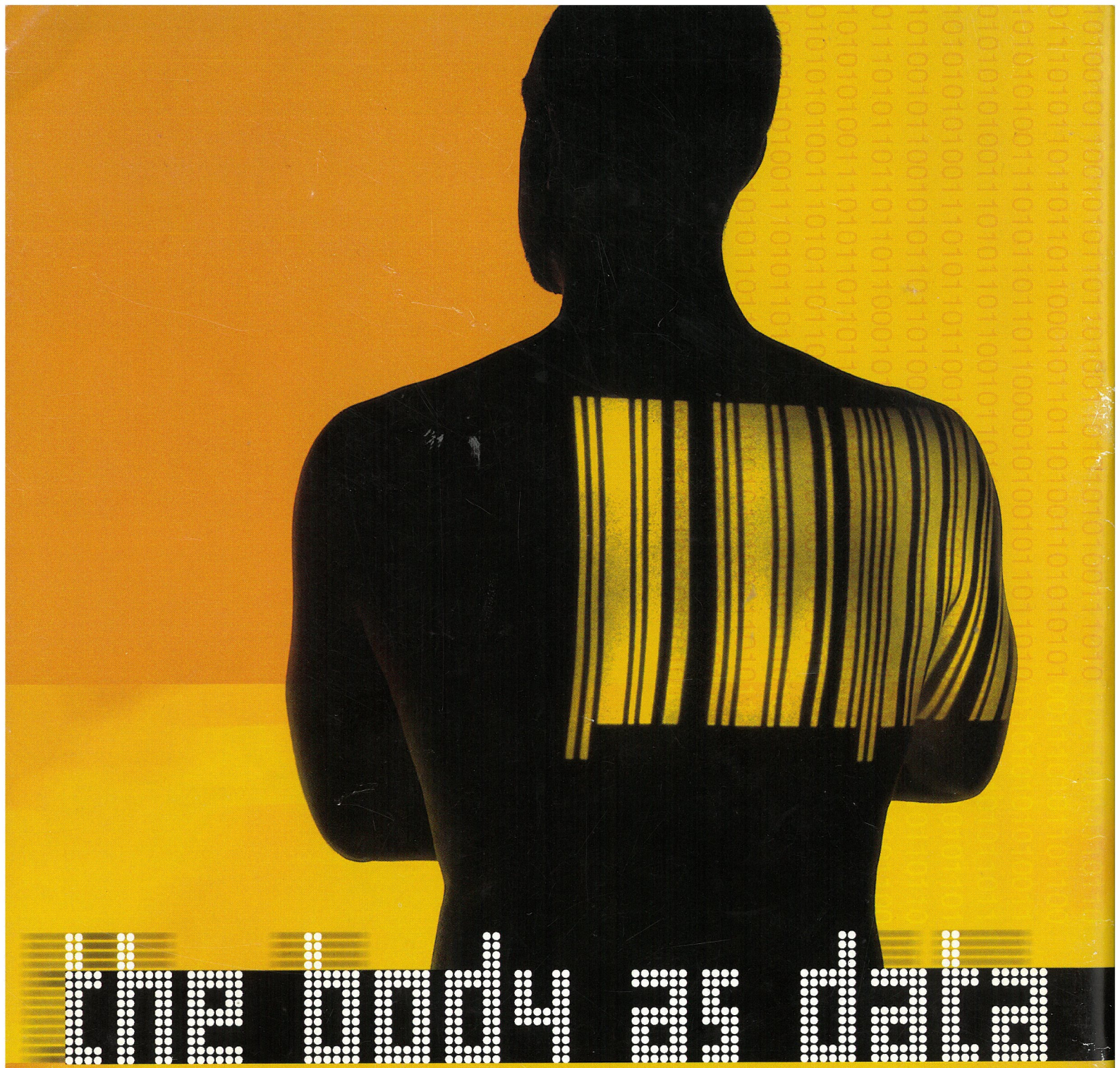

The Body as Data

Biometrics, identity, authentication, DNA, privacy.

Our bodies are increasingly being turned into data. What happens to privacy? The issues deserve more than just sales pitches for technologies, on the one hand, or the simplistic incitement of dread on the other. Benefits and costs need to be diagnosed and weighed with precision.

Privacy Victoria hosts a one-day international conference at Melbourne's Federation Square on 8 September 2003.

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